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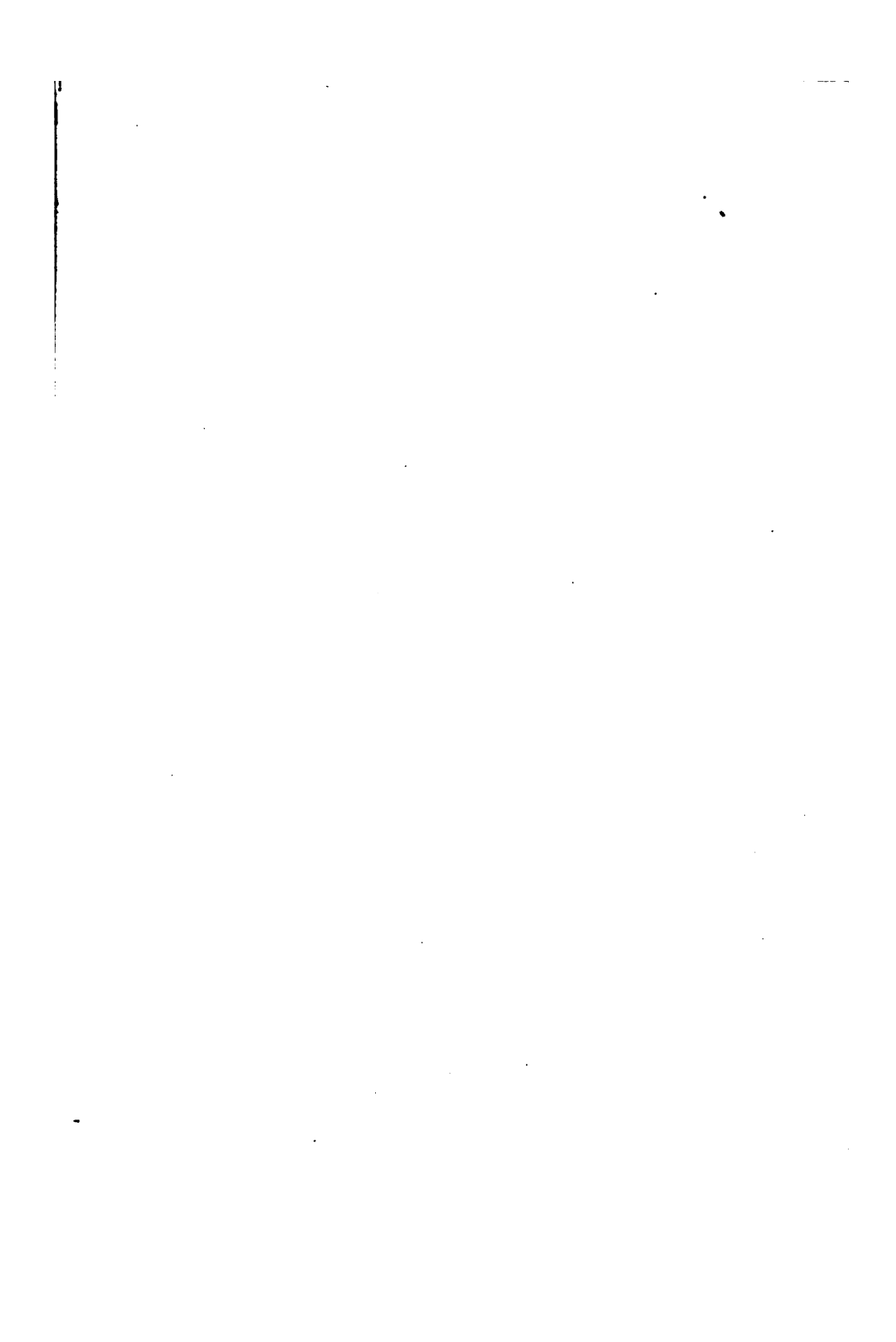
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LOST FOR LOVE.

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# LOST FOR LOVE:

*A NOVEL.*

BY THE AUTHOR OF  
'LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET,'  
ETC. ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

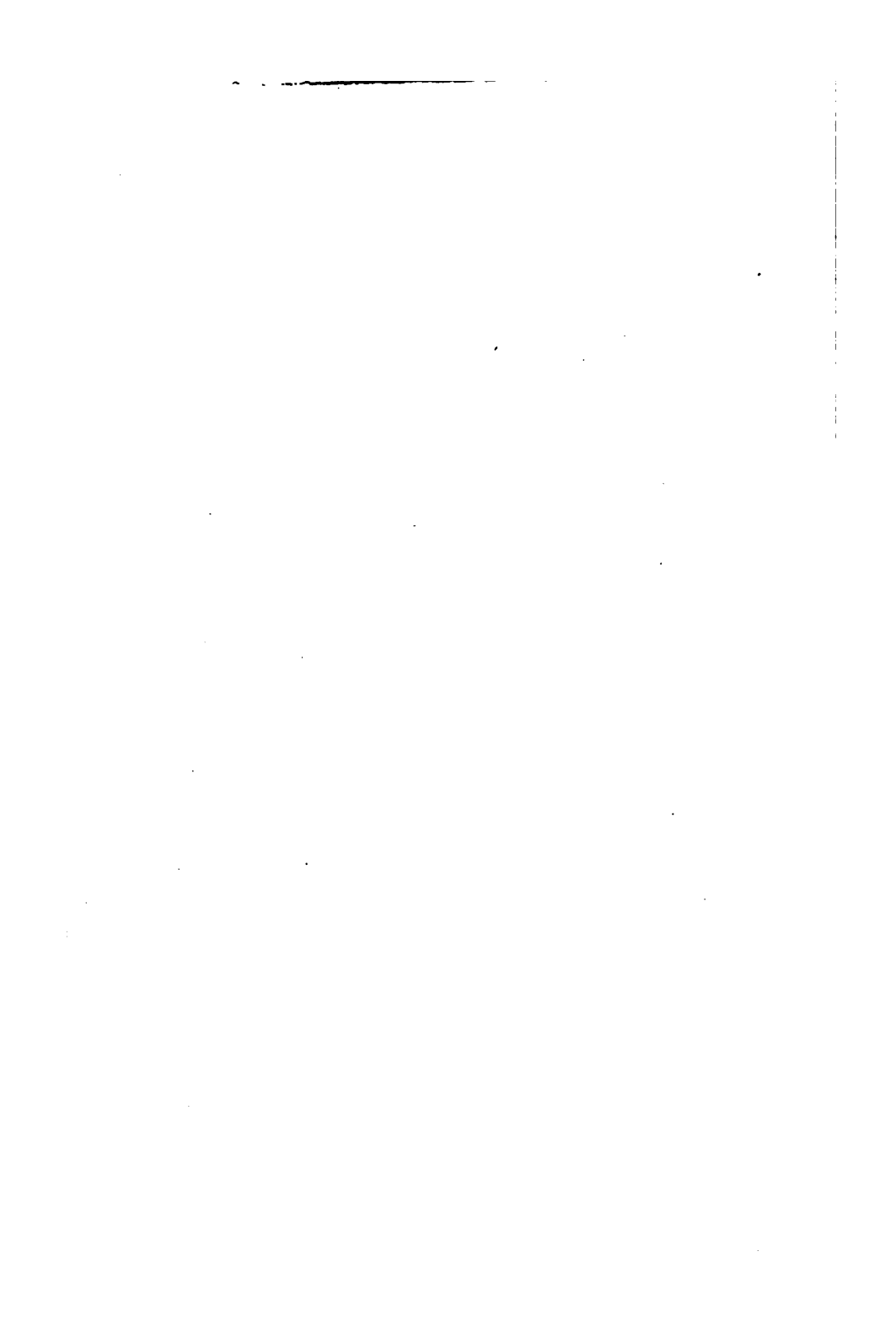
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# LOST FOR LOVE.



## CHAPTER I.

*'Lass mich schweigen! lass mich dich halten. Lass mich dir in die Augen sehen; alles darin finden, Trost und Hoffnung, und Freude und Kummer.'*

THE year was gone, and the heavy crape dresses cast aside. Flora still wore mourning, but the mourning was of a less gloomy order. She wore silk instead of stuff, and white lace and muslin relieved the blackness of her raiment. She went with the doctor and Mrs. Ollivant to an occasional concert; and that simple lady listened patiently to the masterpieces of classical composers, without having the faintest appreciation of their merits. Dr. Ollivant took his ward to picture galleries, and developed her old love of art. The taste, so long subjugated

by grief, was reawakened; but there was always a lurking pain. It hurt her to see the successes of rising young artists, remembering him whose promise death had blighted.

In all things that he did, Flora's well-being was the doctor's paramount consideration. He brought pleasant people to his house; men of professional standing, and their wives. He sought to win friends for her, and the gentle charm of her manner endeared her to the people he brought about her, almost in spite of herself. To know her was to love her.

To Cuthbert Ollivant's small circle of intimates Flora was known only as his ward. Not a hint had he ever given to his closest friend—and his friendships were not many—of his own hopes or Mark Chamney's dying injunctions. The foreseeing remarked that Dr. Ollivant was too young a man to have such a pretty ward with impunity, and that his guardianship must end in a marriage, or in trouble of mind for the guardian. He had been careful to hold himself in check before the world; but a love which was the ruling idea of his life was not easy to

hide. Men were deceived by his calm and even manner, but the women found him out.

‘My dear, I tell you he loves her to distraction,’ said Mrs. Bayne to Dr. Bayne; and as her own marriage had been a love match, with some touch of romance in its history, the lady may have been a fair judge of such matters.

For Flora’s sake Dr. Ollivant cultivated society more than he had ever done in his life; sacrificed precious hours of study to evening parties, more or less inane; gave frequent dinners, to the impoverishment of his income, the doctor’s friends belonging to a class who must be fed sumptuously if fed at all. Poor Mrs. Ollivant sighed as she conned the confectioner’s bill and remembered the pastoral tea and supper parties at Long Sutton, when a pair of fowls at top, and a tongue at bottom, duly supported by a pigeon pie and a lobster salad, a dish or two of tartlets, a bowl of cream and a junket, had constituted the most elaborate supper to which Long Sutton epicureanism had ever aspired.

Cuthbert Ollivant wished his ward to see the world, to be admired, to be sought even, before he

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put forward his claim. With a curious self-abnegation, he, who had been so jealous of Walter Leyburne, took her among younger and more agreeable men than himself, and let her see the contrast between the scholar and slave of science, and the gay young idlers of society; men who seemed to have nothing to do but waltz perfectly and wear exotics in their button-holes.

Flora waltzed with these foplings; but finding not one among them to remind her of Walter Leyburne, suffered their fascinations scatheless, and thought all the better of Dr. Ollivant for the contrast between him and these butterflies. Hitherto she had compared him only with Walter; henceforward she compared him with the mass of mankind, and her estimate of him rose wondrously. So far, therefore, a policy which at first sight might have seemed suicidal had proved the happiest stroke of art.

The second winter after Mark Chamney's death was therefore varied by the pleasures of society. The light-hearted schoolgirl had developed into a thoughtful woman, self-contained, self-possessed,

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accomplished, well-informed. Flora's education had made rapid progress during that year of tranquil seclusion. There were few subjects of which she could not talk, and talk well, yet without a shade of pedantry. Enough of the old girlishness, the old spontaneity remained to make her charming even to the frivolous.

Spring came again, and this time awakening nature found an answering joyfulness in Flora's mind. Last year, the very sunshine had been painful to her, the scent of the flowers had sharpened her grief for the lost, by sad association. All that was brightest on earth had reminded her most keenly of the dead. This year she could think of the past with a gentle subdued sorrow; memory's pangs were still sharp, but much briefer than of old.

Spring in Wimpole-street, where primroses only grew in balcony boxes, was not to be thought of; so Mrs. Ollivant and Flora went down into Berkshire for a fortnight, just to see the April flowers in their glory, and the first tender green of the horse-chestnuts' newly unfolded fans. They went to a quiet little village called Farley Royal, a rural out-of-the-

way nook between Windsor and Beaconsfield, and the doctor promised to run down occasionally, after his wont.

Here they lived a simple rustic life. Mrs. Ollivant devoted her mind to the fabrication of a crochet antimacassar; Flora wore a gray-gingham gown and a straw hat, and rested from the pleasures of society. She read to her adopted mother, painted a good deal—she had taken lessons from an old Frenchman during the winter, and improved considerably—in the open air, wandering in the woods at her own will. There were days when Mrs. Ollivant did not feel herself quite strong enough for these rambles, but preferred to sit alone in the old-fashioned parlour, writing a long letter to her son, or working laboriously at the antimacassar. Flora would have stayed at home to keep her company, but this the elder lady declined.

‘You are so fond of sketching from nature, my love. Why should you deprive yourself of the pleasure? You did not come here to keep me company, but to get health and strength for yourself.’

Thus, after some affectionate remonstrances, it

had been agreed that Flora should roam about as she listed, sketch-book in hand, during the bright spring mornings. In the afternoon she drove Mrs. Ollivant about the pretty neighbourhood in a comfortable basket carriage, drawn by the soberest-minded and most reliable of ponies.

It was the first of May, a Saturday, and the finest morning they had had yet; a typical first of May, upon which one could easily fancy Scottish damsels tripping to St. Anthony's chapel at the foot of grassy Arthur's Seat, to gather May dew for their complexions. Flora set off for her favourite bit of woodland scenery directly after an eight-o'clock breakfast. She wanted to paint a little bit of the greenwood, a rough rustic bridge over a brook which late rains had widened just at this spot to a shallow pool of clearest water. All nature's colours were at their brightest just now, with a soft freshness and clearness that would be burnt out of them by and by with the sultry heat of summer—bluest hyacinths, purplest violets, yellowest primroses, silver-white anemones—all nature clad in fresh unfaded robes, as in life's morning.



Flora spread her shawl at the foot of a pollarded beech, whose massive trunk the sunshine flecked with silver here and there, filtering downward through the over-arching chestnut boughs, for the wood here was thickest, and the young fan-shaped leaves made a green canopy. She settled her sketching-block on her knee, mixed her colours in the small tin box, and set to work with a keen delight in the labour, though Winsor and Newton's brightest tints seemed dull and muddy compared with that tender luminous colour of lavish Nature's painting. Colour she could reproduce faithfully enough, only light was wanting.

She worked for an hour, lost in the artistic pleasure of her work, hardly knowing whether she was doing well or ill, when a voice behind her said quietly,

'Monsieur St. Armand's lessons have not been thrown away, I perceive. He may congratulate himself upon having so industrious a pupil.'

'Dr. Ollivant!' she cried, startled, but hardly surprised. He had been expected that evening.

He was standing there with his hat off, breath-

ing quickly, as if from rapid walking, looking brighter than he was wont to look, less the dry-as-dust hard-working doctor than usual. There was a glow upon his cheek, a light in his eye that made him look younger than he looked in Wimpole-street.

‘Mamma didn’t expect you till supper-time,’ said Flora; ‘we live in quite a primitive style here, you know—dinner at two, and a tea-supper at eight.’

‘I changed my mind and started directly after breakfast. For once in my life I allowed myself to be influenced by the weather. There was sunshine enough even in my consulting-room to set me longing to be in the woods or the meadows with you; so I flung discretion to the winds, and drove straight off to Paddington.’

‘How nice of you!’ she said, putting up her brushes in the little paint-box. ‘Let us go home to mamma and give her a long drive. She will be so delighted to have you.’

‘No, Flora, I must have my morning with you; I came down early on purpose for that. My mother shall have her drive later, but you and I must spend

this one May morning together; you and I, and never a third. I only called at the house to ascertain which direction you had taken, and then came in search of you.'

'You must do as you please,' said Flora, a little embarrassed, and with a painful recollection of a certain scene in Tadmor churchyard.

'I know but one pleasure in the world, one happiness, one end and aim of all my days: to be with you. Flora, I have been very patient; is it too soon to speak? Am I no more to you now than I was that day in Devonshire, when I let passion get the upperhand of prudence? Have I done nothing to prove my truth since then; nothing to show myself worthy of your love?'

'You have been more than good to me,' she answered gently, deeply moved; 'too good; so much kinder than I deserve. It would be strange if I were not grateful and attached to you. Except mamma, you are the only friend I have upon earth. You have outlived my narrow world.'

There was bitterness in that last sentence, the pain of an inextinguishable regret.

'Can you give me nothing more than gratitude, Flora? Give me but a little of the love I have given you, and must give you to the end of my life, and I am content. O, my dearest, I ask so little from you; hardly more than I should claim from a flower or a bird which I might choose to be the ornament of my life. Love me a little; or at worst tolerate me; suffer my love. Let me have you to cherish, and think for, and care for, and toil for. I will work for you, love; labour to make my name famous for your sake. Grant me only as little as that, Flora; it is not much to ask.'

Deeper humility never proved the wondrous depth of love. Flora trembled at the thought of so infinite a passion, so great a treasure unregarded; trembled, and with a sigh remembered Walter's light love and careless wooing. And she would have given half her life for such love as this from him.

'It is too little for you to ask,' she said timidly; 'yet I can give no more. Papa wished me to be your wife. For his sake—'

'No, Flora, for my sake, not for his. As an

almsgiving to a beggar, if you like ; but out of pure pity for me, and for me alone. I will not have you if you would marry me for your father's sake. I would have taken any gift from his hand but that ; not that. Your love, your compassion, your gratitude, whatever it pleases you to call it, must be freely given ; of yourself, from yourself.'

There was some touch of pride here, which contrasted curiously with his humility just now.

'I have let you see the world, Flora. You have had admirers enough to show you what kind of rivals would dispute the prize with me. I daresay I seem a dryasdust wooer compared with those young men.'

'There is not one of them worthy to be compared with you,' she answered earnestly. 'If—if I had never cared for any one else—'

His face darkened.

'Why speak of the dead?' he asked. 'If I were Destiny and could give your lover back to you, do you suppose I would not have done it long ago, rather than be tortured by the sight of your grief? I cannot give him back, Flora. I cannot lay down

my hopes again as I laid them down the day I heard of your engagement, and schooled myself to submit to the irrevocable. You would have heard no more of my love if Walter Leyburne had lived. But among the many glad young lives that are taken every year, Fate chose to take his; are you to mourn for him all your days, change all youth's natural joys to sorrow because he is gone?

'I have left off mourning for him, you see,' she answered, 'for I seem to be tolerably happy. I wonder at myself sometimes, that I can be happy without papa or him. And yet I know that he never gave me love for love.'

'You know that?'

'Yes. I have found out a secret about him, since his death.'

'What secret?' asked the doctor breathlessly.

'I cannot tell you that. I would rather never mention his name again. I gave him my love foolishly, childishly, unsought. It is so bitter to remember that.'

'Forget it, then, Flora, and reward a love which your coldness could never lessen, your indifference

has never checked ; measureless love, which would survive if disease effaced your beauty, if madness obscured your mind ; love which would cling to you and follow you through the worst changes that Fate could bring. Give me all I pray for, dearest—a tithe.'

He was kneeling on the turf at her feet, his hands clasping hers, his eyes raised to her downcast face, half in supplication, half in scrutiny.

'I will give you all I can—fidelity and obedience.'

He drew the blushing face down to him, and kissed the tremulous lips, his first kiss of love.

'My beloved,' he said softly, 'I would rather have fidelity from you than any other woman's fondest love. And if I cannot make you care for me, and if I cannot make you love me fondly before our days are done, love is something less than a god.'

Flora felt a strange sense of rest and peacefulness after the ratification of that betrothal which, to her mind, had been made at her father's death-bed.

She had never thought it possible to repudiate Cuthbert Ollivant's claim. Her dying father had given her to him. That bondage was sacred. She had shrunk from the thought of the day when Dr. Ollivant should claim his due; but now that the claim had been made she was content, nay she felt more at peace than she had felt since Mark Chamney's death. Henceforward her lot was fixed; the quiet house in Wimpole-street her only home, the orderly eventless life to go on for all the years to come, death alone ending it.

There was some happiness, after all, in being so entirely beloved, and that by a man whom she was proud to confess her superior. Society had told her a good deal about Dr. Ollivant of late, and his praises had sounded sweet in her ear. They were still more welcome to her after her betrothal, for they reminded her what reason she had to be proud of her lover. She was proud of him. If she denied him love, she gave him reverence.

Never was there so submissive a mistress. She obeyed her lover in all things, consulted his wishes, studied his lightest inclinations, laboured to improve



hērsēlf daily in some small measure, so that she might become less unworthy of such measureless devotion. They were the most chivalrous of lovers, and knew nothing of those pretty little quarrels, and small contests for power, which mingle their agreeable acidity with the honey of some courtships. Mrs. Ollivant basked in the sunshine of her son's happiness, and thought that Heaven had made this girl for his sake.

'Let it be soon, dearest,' said Cuthbert, one evening when Flora had come down to his consulting-room for a book; and there in that sober and somewhat gruesome chamber, where many a man had heard his death-warrant, the lovers stood side by side in the summer dusk, Flora reaching upward for the volume she wanted, the doctor's arm put gently round her as he tried to draw her towards him.

'Never mind Carlyle's *Revolution* just now, darling. I'll find the volume presently. I want you to answer me that one question. When are we to be married? It is nearly six months since you gave me your promise. You cannot say that I have been an impatient lover?'

‘You know I am always ready to do what you wish,’ replied Flora meekly.

‘My Griselda! Let it be this day month, then—just in time for me to show you Italy. November is a delightful month in Rome. We will escape London fogs; and—well, for one of us, at least, earth will be paradise.’

‘I should like to see Rome,’ said Flora, with a subdued pleasure, not the girlish rapture she had felt when she thought of making her pilgrimage to that famous city with Walter Leyburne for her companion. ‘But isn’t a month a very short time?’

‘No, love, not when I have waited so long already. I shouldn’t have been so patient perhaps, only I wished you to get used to the idea of our union, to be quite certain it would be tolerable to you. You haven’t repented, have you, Flora, and you don’t want to recall the promise you gave me by that old pollard beech near Farley Royal?’

‘No, no,’ she said eagerly; and then with infinite shyness, ‘I like you better now than I did then.’

‘My treasure!’ he murmured, folding her in his

arms with fondest proudest sense of ownership. 'If love deserves return, I have more right to be so blessed, not otherwise. My own one, if you knew how happy you make me by one little word like that. Like me, sweet, and liking shall blossom into love, by and by. I can afford to be patient, having won you.'

The date of their marriage was settled between them then and there. It was to be as Cuthbert liked, and as mamma liked, Flora said. Cuthbert told her that he and his mother were of one mind, and that the wedding-day could not come too soon. They were still standing by the bookshelves, discussing this question, when the man-of-all-work announced 'a person' to see Dr. Ollivant.

There is always something uncomfortable, something doubtful, if not mysterious, in that announcement of 'a person.' The vagueness of the description has something awe-inspiring. The person may be anything, from the King of Terrors himself, bony of aspect and armed with his deadly insignia, down to the tax-gatherer. That word 'person' covers all possibilities.

‘What does he want with me?’ the doctor asked, with some slight irritation. ‘Is it a patient?’

‘I think not, sir. I asked if he wanted to see you professionally, and he said it was on particular business.’

‘Where is he?’

‘In the hall, sir.’

‘Then you had better keep your eye upon the coats and umbrellas. There’s your book, Flora,’ said Dr. Ollivant, selecting a volume in russet morocco; ‘I’ll come up-stairs directly I’ve done with this person.’

He went out of the room with Flora, and watched the light little figure ascending the stairs till it was beyond his ken, before he turned to the outer hall where the person awaited his pleasure.

There stood the person, a bulky broad-shouldered figure in the uncertain light. Dr. Ollivant went close up to him.

It was Jarred Gurner.

‘What, is it you, my man? I thought I’d done with you.’

‘So I thought,’ replied the intruder, in a tone that

was half sulky, half apologetic ; ‘but the world has been hard upon me, and I’m obliged to look you up again.’

‘Come in here, sir,’ said the doctor sternly, opening the dining-room door as he spoke, ‘and let us make an end of this business.’

‘I beg your pardon, doctor, I don’t see how you can do that without making a clean breast of it to Miss Chamney. And I don’t suppose you’ve brought your mind to that.’

The wedding-day came—very swiftly as it seemed to Flora—a clear calm day at the end of October, just such a day as that which saw Mark Chamney’s death, two years ago.

It was the quietest possible wedding, not at all like a Wimpole-street wedding, as the nursemaids and gossips of the neighbourhood remarked to one another. A physician out of Cavendish-square—the square, as Wimpoleites called it—and Cuthbert’s oldest professional friend gave the bride away; his daughter, a fair-faced girl of seventeen, was the only bridesmaid. There were no guests but these two:

for the doctor had his own peculiar ideas about this ceremonial of marriage, and deemed that so solemn a cast of Fate's die should hardly be made amidst a smiling, critical, or indifferent crowd.

'Had I made myself more friends—real heart-friends—I would bring them round you to-day, Flora,' he said on that fateful morning; 'but I have been too busy for friendship, and I don't care to make my wedding-day a holiday for my acquaintance.'

So after a quiet wedding, and a cosy little banquet at a round table decorated with white exotics, the doctor and his bride drove off to the railway station, on their way to Dover, and Mrs. Ollivant sighed to think how dreary the house would seem for the next month or so without them.

There had been one uninvited spectator at that quiet wedding, in the person of Mr. Jarred Gurner, not usually given to attend such ceremonials; once in a lifetime, according to his own statement, having been too much for him. But this marriage he beheld from behind the covert of a clustered column with considerable satisfaction.

‘I think I’ve got him ever so much tighter now, he said within himself. ‘If the sight of me has been poison all along, it will be double-distilled poison in future. If he has shelled out pretty freely in the past, he’ll have to shell out handsomer still by and by.’

## CHAPTER II.

' Forgive, if somehow I forget,  
In woe to come, the present bliss ;  
As frightened Proserpine let fall  
Her flowers at the sight of Dis :  
E'en so the dark and bright will kiss—  
The sunniest things throw sternest shade,  
And there is e'en a happiness  
That makes the heart afraid !'

DR. OLLIVANT brought his young wife home early in December, to all appearances as bright and happy a bride as a man could desire to give gladness to his days. The Wimpole-street house had been swept and garnished to do her honour, the fond mother taking pride in the preparation of her son's home. There was hardly a trace of the Long Sutton primness left in any of the rooms, though some of the substantial old furniture remained. It would have cost Mrs. Ollivant too sharp a pang to part with all these cherished memorials of her peaceful wedded



life; the tables and chiffoniers which her own industrious hands had polished and dusted in days gone by. There were flowers all about the room when Flora saw it after her journey, despite the wintry weather outside. A new carpet of more delicate hues and more artistic pattern replaced the Long Sutton Brussels; new curtains draped the windows—curtains of French cretonne, palest lavender and rose; the design copied from a tapestry that had clothed the walls of Marie Antoinette's boudoir.

‘Why, it looks like a new house!’ cried Flora, gazing round admiringly, when she had kissed her husband’s mother ever so many times in the gladness of reunion.

‘But I am here to remind you that it is only an old one,’ said Mrs. Ollivant; ‘until you grow tired of me.’

‘Tired of you, mamma! What should I do without you? It wouldn’t be coming home at all if you were not here. We might as well go to an hotel at once; mightn’t we, Cuthbert?’

‘Yes, dearest,’ answered the doctor, looking tenderly down at the fair young face in its matronly

bonnet. Flora had insisted on wearing a bonnet since her marriage; in order that she might look like a married woman, she said.

‘And how did you like Rome?’ asked Mrs. Ollivant, just as if she had been asking about Ramsgate, and could be answered in a sentence.

‘O mamma!’ exclaimed Flora, and rushed into a rapturous description of the great city, which lasted till Mrs. Ollivant grew uneasy about the dinner.

‘Come up-stairs and take off your things, my pet,’ she said in the middle of Flora’s account of the Colosseum by moonlight. Mrs. Ollivant had a vague idea that she had heard something of it before, and she was impatient to display the glories of those upstairs rooms which had been refurnished for the young wife.

Here, in the best bedroom and adjoining dressing-room, the Long Sutton movables had been discarded altogether. The doctor had furnished the rooms after his own taste, by way of giving Flora a pleasant surprise on her return. The room on the third floor, where she kept her relics of the past, would still be hers. No profane hand had disturbed

that. But these rooms he had beautified as a wedding-gift for his bride.

Dr. Ollivant's taste in upholstery leaned to an elegant simplicity. The furniture was of bright-looking light wood, the draperies pale blue silk, that innocent youthful blue of summer skies, which seemed Flora's appropriate colour, the tender hue of forget-me-nots blooming by some meadow-brook. The dressing-room was a nest of blue and white—so pretty that Flora gave a little breathless cry of rapture at sight of it.

'O mamma, how good you are to me!' she exclaimed. 'Can I ever be grateful enough for so much love?'

'It was not I, my dear,' answered Mrs. Ollivant; 'I only superintended the alterations. Cuthbert chose everything—nothing could be too good or too pretty for you in his opinion.'

The doctor was on the threshold watching his young wife's pleased surprise. She turned to him with a smile, yet almost moved to tears by this new evidence of his affection. 'What can I do to prove my gratitude, Cuthbert?' she said.

‘Be happy, my love. It is the only favour I ask of you.’

‘How can I be otherwise than happy, when you and mamma are so kind?’

She kissed them both in her simple innocent manner, like a child who bestows grateful kisses on the giver of her last new toy, and then began to examine her treasures in detail—the dressing-table, with its innumerable drawers and elaborate contrivances, which might have accommodated the machinery of a Poppæa’s charms, or of her whose toilet her warrior husband compared to an arsenal; the dainty little davenport, with its blue velvet-covered desk and oxydised silver implements; the luxurious easy-chair; the jardinière filled with china-roses and lilies of the valley.

‘My love, don’t thank me for these trifles,’ remonstrated Cuthbert, after another little gush of gratitude. ‘Do you forget that you are an heiress, and entitled to have every caprice gratified?’

‘But how nice of you to find out just what I should like the best! I never could go into an upholsterer’s and choose the prettiest things in his shop

and say, "Send me home those." It would seem the acme of selfishness. And, then, things I bought myself would never be so nice as gifts from you. How did you know I was so fond of blue and white?

'Haven't I seen you wear them? It would be strange if I didn't know your favourite colours, love, when your tastes and inclinations are the most interesting study I have.'

Thus began a wedded life which was like a pastoral poem in its simple happiness. On one side, the profoundest, strongest love which man's heart is capable of feeling; on the other side, a gentle affection which time ripened and strengthened. If a man could turn a key upon the chamber of memory, and say to himself, 'I will unlock that door never again,' Cuthbert Ollivant might have been supremely content; but even his vigorous mind failed in the endeavour to forget one particular scene in his life, and the thought of that summer day on the cliff near Branscomb rose before him like a ghost amidst his happiest hours.

Even that remorseful memory could not destroy his happiness; it only gave a feverish taste to joy—as of something that might be fleeting. The one

fatal question would suggest itself, 'What if she knew the truth?'

Or what if in some evil hour an enemy's version of facts were presented to her, and the real truth, as known to the all-seeing Judge, were withheld from her knowledge? Were she to learn half the truth from malicious lips, would she believe the whole truth if she heard it from his? Would she give him an instant's credence if she knew that he had deceived her all along, had known the history of her lover's death and kept it from her, caused that death, and smiled in her face, and pretended to console her?

'There are treasons that a woman cannot forgive,' thought Dr. Ollivant, 'and mine is one of them.'

In everything that he did for her—every service he rendered, every fresh proof of his abounding love—he remembered that unforgiven, undiscovered wrong, and thought how she would have scorned his kindness and repudiated his gifts, if she had but known. And Fate hovered about his path always, in the person of Jarred Gurner; not an easy gentleman to manage, as Cuthbert Ollivant had already discovered.

Thus there was always a scorpion among the smiling blossoms of the doctor's Eden ; and when Flora looked at him most kindly, thoughts of darkest possibilities would flit across the secret chambers of his brain and poison his delight.

Something in his manner made Flora suspect that he had secret cares, and one day she taxed him with hiding his troubles from her.

'I don't want to be a fair-weather wife, Cuthbert,' she said to him one day, 'or to be treated quite as a child, though it is very nice to be so petted by you and mamma. You have such a pained look sometimes, a look that darkens your face for a moment like a passing cloud. And I have heard you sigh in the midst of a smile. I know you have some anxiety which you fancy you ought to hide from me. That isn't kind of you, dear. I have a right to share your burdens.'

'You lighten them all, my pet. As to trouble, a professional man must always have perplexities. I mustn't bring the shop into our home-life. My mother can tell you that I have no troubles of my own. Providence has been very good to me. I earn more

money than we can spend. My name is rising in my profession. And I have the sweetest wife that Heaven ever bestowed upon an erring mortal.'

'You mean to say that you are quite happy then, Cuthbert? And when I see that troubled look come over your face I may feel assured it is only some unselfish care for one of your patients that disturbs you?'

'Think what you like, love, except that I can be unhappy when I have you. Perhaps I may feel a little like Polycrates when he threw his ring into the sea, or Cræsus when he bragged to Solon. There is such a thing as being too happy.'

The doctor kept a closer guard upon himself after this, and let no cloud upon his countenance betray that hidden page of memory, the one fatal page at which the book *would* open.

Never was wife more indulged than Flora. Her existence was one bright holiday, spent among books and flowers and music, fenced in and surrounded by love. Of the actual burden of life she knew nothing. Mrs. Ollivant kept the house, and took the weight of all sordid cares upon her own patient shoulders.



Flora was never plagued about servants or butchers' bills, or perplexed about the ordering of dinners. If she had lived in a fairy palace, where all the household work was performed by enchantment, she could not have been more free from household cares. And for once in a way that much-abused relationship of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law resulted in perfect harmony. Mrs. Ollivant senior was not reduced to a nonentity in the home where she had been accustomed to rule, and Mrs. Ollivant junior did not consider herself ill-used because her mother-in-law kept the keys and gave her orders to the servants. Nor did the servants even complain that they had two mistresses, for all were agreed upon regarding Flora as a kind of ornamental addition to the household, its glory and its pride. The cook would come to the top of the kitchen staircase to peep at her when she was going to a party; the housemaids felt honoured when she permitted them to assist her in the arrangement of the flowers that filled jardinières and vases, and beautified every room with which Flora had anything to do. Arranging the flowers and seeing to the birds—the big cage of canaries was established in the

back drawing-room window—made up the sum of young Mrs. Ollivant's household work.

The house in Wimpole-street was gayer this winter than it had been yet. Flora found it necessary to have an evening for her friends, a reception at which there was always good music and pleasant society, while Mrs. Ollivant senior took care that there should be unsurpassable tea and coffee, and a well-furnished buffet in the dining-room; a detail that helped to make the doctor's house popular. When the opera season began, Dr. Ollivant surprised his wife with the gift of a box on the pit tier of Covent Garden; small, but snug, and newly furnished for its new tenant. He asked her one day if she would not like to have a country house; and when she smiled and said, 'Yes, it would be rather nice,' flung the title-deeds of a villa at Teddington, just above the lock, into her lap.

'You need not be mewed up in London always, my love, because I am too selfish to part from you,' he said. 'Teddington is near enough for me to come backwards and forwards every day, and you can go and stay there whenever you like; though I

confess to feeling happier even down-stairs in my consulting-room when I know that you are here, and that I may see your bright face at any moment.'

Furnishing the Teddington villa made a pleasing diversion from Hyde Park and the Italian Opera. This time Flora chose all the furniture, with occasional advice and assistance from her husband. Dr. Ollivant had bought the villa as a toy for his wife, and he wished her to have the largest possible amount of amusement out of it.

This was his only notion of atonement for that wrong the memory of which stung him like a serpent's tooth. That his wife should have every delight that the heart of a woman could desire—through him—be sheltered from every peril, relieved of every care—by him—so that if ever, with the knowledge of that deadly secret, she should come to hate him, she must even then, looking back at her present life, confess, 'He was good to me, and some of my happiest days were spent with him.'

Was Flora perfectly happy in her new life? If she had been asked that question, and had examined the woof of her existence ever so narrowly, she would

have found it difficult to discover flaw or speck in the fabric. She looked back sometimes at the unforgotten girlish days and their dead joys; but it seemed to her that the Flora of that time was some one else, a girl she had known, beloved and happy—an image of girlhood and thoughtless gladness which had faded out of the world long ago. Our lives are rarely homogeneous—the same in shape and substance and colour. They are rather particoloured patches of existence, joined together haphazard by Fate's rough workmanship. Looking back at that old life and its cloudless unquestioning delight, Flora still held it the best and happiest of her years. But she confessed to herself and to her husband that she was perfectly happy in the present, happy even when she sat alone in that rural churchyard on the north side of London, where her father slept the sweetest of all slumbers under the gray granite cross that marked his last abiding-place.

‘Papa wished us to be married,’ she said to her husband once; ‘that is my happiest thought when I go to look at his grave. I should be miserable if I had married any one he disliked.’

### CHAPTER III.

'There shall be time for deeds, and soon enough,  
Let that come when it may. And it may be  
Deeds must be done shall shut and shrivel up  
All quiet thoughts, and quite preclude repose  
To the end of time. Upon this narrow strait  
And promontory of our mortal life  
We stand between what was, and is not yet.'

ANY privileged person who had been admitted to the sacred interior of Mr. Gurner's home at this period could hardly have failed to perceive a change in that gentleman's manner of living—nay, even in the man himself—though here the difference, being more subtle, would naturally have been more difficult to define.

It was one of Jarred Gurner's idiosyncrasies, however, to keep himself very much to himself, so far as the domestic hearth was concerned, and to invite no one to his house, unless for some special reason, grounded upon self-interest. Few visitors had ever been allowed the privileges of intimate

friendship which Jarred had accorded to Mr. Leyburne. He had his friends—chosen comrades and allies—but these he was in the habit of meeting at certain favourite taverns in the neighbourhood, where social intercourse was less restrained than it might have been in his own house, and the materials for conviviality were ready to hand.

‘I don’t want anybody spying about my place,’ Mr. Gurner was wont to remark; an observation not altogether complimentary to those boon companions whose jovial society gave wings to his evening hours.

Thus it happened that there were few to remark the change that had come over the spirit of Jarred Gurner’s life inside the house in Voysey-street. The gossips outside took note of the fact that Mrs. Gurner bought more butcher’s meat than in former years, and that Jarred came home tipsy oftener than of old, and worked less, as testified by the darkness of the first-floor-front windows on many an evening, instead of the cheerful glare of gas which had formerly testified to his industry.

Prosperity therefore of some kind, the Voysey-street gossips opined, had befallen the Gurners. It

was not that the second-hand wardrobe business was brisker than of old, for the tawdry garments hung even longer in the window and the shop-door bell jingled less frequently. Had the Gurners been blessed with a legacy—that windfall from the golden apple-trees of Fortune's Hesperidian garden? This question Voysey-street answered in the negative. A legacy was a blessing which old Mrs. Gurner would have bragged about. It would have been heard of at the chandler's, and been mentioned at the bar of the King's Head, where Mrs. Gurner went daily, and twice a day, for beer. No; there was something mysterious in the source of the Gurners' prosperity—something that Voysey-street could not get to the bottom of.

Could these inquisitive spirits have entered Jarred's domestic circle, they might have seen that his prosperity, whatever its source, was not an unalloyed blessing. He had ever been too apt to do his work in spurts, and to loaf away long gaps of time between his spasmodic bursts of industry. But now the spurts of application to business were rarer; his hand was less steady, his eye less keen when he did

work. He neglected some of his best customers, both in the violin and picture trade; contrived to mislay a genuine Straduarious back which he was to have worked into the anatomy of a modern fiddle, mellowed by ten years' use in an orchestra, whereby that instrument would have become, according to the dealer's warranty, a genuine Straduarious. He dawdled over a picture for a patron whom he would formerly have put himself out of the way to serve. In a word, Jarred Gurner, who had never trodden the fairest highways of life, was now on the road to ruin.

Mrs. Gurner perceived and lamented this decadence of her son, and bewailed it in many a rhapsody upon the obscure ways of Fate, poured into the ear of the desultory handmaiden who now came for three or four hours a day to help in the housework, but rather as a semi-soliloquy, or involuntary flow of eloquence, like the philosophic outbursts of a Greek Chorus, than as a positive address to this damsel.

True that there was less difficulty about the water-rate than in days of yore, and that solid butcher's meat usurped the place of such cheaper



delicacies as tripe, sausages, cowheel, and sheep's-head on Mrs. Gurner's board. Yet even this abundance brought no sense of satisfaction to that depressed householder's mind, for there was an air of insecurity about Jarred's life which troubled her more than the small perplexities of the past.

Perhaps Mrs. Gurner felt these anxieties all the more keenly for lack of the accustomed confidante of all her woes. Louisa was missing from that small household, and no one in Voysey-street knew whither she had departed. A cab had been seen in the autumnal dawn, two years ago, by a few early risers—Voysey-street was not famous for early hours—a cab laden with a trunk and a bonnet-box, both new, standing at Mrs. Gurner's door; and Louisa had been seen to enter this cab, while Jarred, in shirt-sleeves and slippers, gave instructions to the cabman. Father and daughter had been seen to kiss affectionately and part; and from that day to this Voysey-street knew Louisa Gurner no more.

Mrs. Gurner, when questioned by her gossips, replied that Louisa was in a situation; whereupon some among her intimates remarked to each other

that they hoped it was a situation which became a young woman to be in, but that they, for their parts, never liked mystery, and were inclined to think that old Mrs. Gurner wouldn't be quite so close about that dark-eyed granddaughter of hers if there were not something to hide from the searching light of public opinion.

The house, or that portion of it which the Gurners occupied, had a dreary air without Loo's quick step, and snatches of song, and brightly dark face flashing out from shadowy corners, as the girl moved briskly to and fro. The hireling who did Loo's work for half-a-crown a week and her dinner was afflicted with red hair and white eyelashes—was, moreover, slightly deaf, very slow in her movements, and subject to chronic influenza.

'It has been my lot in life to lose every creature that belonged to me,' remarked Mrs. Gurner drearily, as she took her place at the dinner-table, after a somewhat exasperating morning's work with this girl.

Jarred, not long risen from his late-sought couch, unwashed, uncombed, and in his favourite negligé

costume of shirt-sleeves and rusty black-velvet smoking-cap, yawned and stretched as he listlessly contemplated the board, where a shoulder of mutton, roasted to a turn, and basted with heroic constancy by Mrs. Gurner's own hand, and a savoury mess of creamy-looking onion-sauce, invited his languid appetite.

'Well, you haven't lost me, anyhow, old lady,' he said, between two yawns.

'I'm not so sure about that neither, Jarred,' bemoaned the afflicted mother. 'So far as sleeping under the same roof—at hours when respectable folks are up and about—and making believe to eat your meals here—for healthy appetite you have none—I'll allow that I haven't lost you. But you're no more the Jarred you used to be a few years ago than the hair under my false front is the colour it was when I was twenty years of age, and people called me the pretty Mrs. Gurner.'

'Ah,' said Jarred, with a careless sigh, 'all things change. It's the first law of Nature.

"Man's yesterday may ne'er be like his morrow;  
Naught may endure but mutability."

There's poetry for you, and sound sense into the bargain. You don't always find them together.'

'I shouldn't complain of your changing, Jarred,' whimpered Mrs. Gurner, looking despondently at the plate of meat which her son had just handed her, and helping herself to onion-sauce with an air of being above such trivial considerations as sauce to meat, 'if I could get to the bottom of it, and knew what had brought it about. But I can't, and I don't. There never was a mother who had less of her son's confidence than I have. You spend our quarter's income before the quarter's half over; and then, when there isn't a penny in the house, and no resource open to you that I know of, you go out some evening, and come back after midnight very much the worse for liquor, and with your pocket full of sovereigns.'

'Come, stop that howling,' cried Jarred sternly, the slumbering tiger in that gentleman's breast fully awakened by this time. 'I don't think you've any reason to complain. You live better than you've ever lived before, since I can remember. You haven't the tax-gatherer hounding you, or the land-

lord pressing for his rent, and you may shut up that tinpot shop of yours to-morrow if you like, and fold your arms and sit by the fire, and do nothing but nag—you'll never leave that off while there's a tongue in your head—for the rest of your days. What does it matter to you how I come by my money, or what I do with it, so long as I keep a good home over your head, and fill your inside with first-class victuals ?'

'That's all very well, Jarred, but it isn't enough for a mother ; a mother's anxieties are not so easily stifled. I want to know where your money comes from.'

'Why, I work hard for some of it, don't I?' growled Mr. Gurner, pushing away his plate, after a vain attempt to do justice to that well-cooked shoulder.

'Precious little can you get by the work you do nowadays, Jarred.'

'Well, you know where the most of our money comes from, at any rate.'

'I know there's three hundred a year allowed us—and a very liberal allowance too, and one that

might keep us with comfort, and in a more respectable neighbourhood than Voysey-street, if you weren't so reckless.'

'Hang your respectable neighbourhoods ! What do I want with a respectable neighbourhood, where there's nothing but psalm-singing old tabbies, who would be on the listen to catch me coming home late ; a nest of gossips where a man can't take an extra glass, or stand at his door-step of an evening with a clay pipe in his mouth, without setting the whole street magging about him ? You may make your mind easy about that. If ever I leave Voysey-street it will be to go farther afield than you'll care to travel with me.'

'I said so,' sobbed Mrs. Gurner. 'I felt it hanging over me. You'll be the next to desert me.'

'I shall do it pretty quick, if you don't put a check upon that worrying tongue of yours,' responded Jarred sharply. 'There, I don't want a chapter in Lamentations—make the best of life, if you can. Most women in your place would think themselves uncommonly lucky after the stroke of good fortune that happened to us a year or two ago.'

‘It hasn’t made my life any brighter, Jarred. It has robbed me of the only one of my kith and kin that I had to care for, except you, and it has made you and me farther apart than we used to be.’

‘That’s what I call high-falutin,’ retorted Jarred. ‘If you expect that I am to sit at home and mope when I’ve a shilling to spare for a lively evening at the Hare and Hounds, or in the pit of a theatre where there’s a good burlesque on, you expect too much. Human nature is human nature all the world over, and I’m too much of a man to be exempt from the weaknesses of mankind.’

Mrs. Gurner sighed, and desisted from her complainings. She knew Jarred well enough to know that it was perilous to push him too far. Vegetable-dish covers and pewter pots flying, meteor-like, across the room were phenomena that had been beheld in Voysey-street.

The year wore on—the second year of Dr. Ollivant’s wedded life, and Jarred Gurner seemed to grow daily less inclined for work. The dust lay thick upon the implements of his handicraft, the little jars and pots of oil and varnish and turpentine,

the rags and sponges and flannels, accumulated in a heterogeneous heap upon a table in the first-floor front, which was at once Jarred's workshop, bed-chamber, and private sitting-room; the chamber where the Lamia picture had been painted. The canvas still stood there, its face turned to the wall, dusty, cobweb-garnished, incomplete, forgotten—like that worst of all ruins, a wasted life.

As time went by, Jarred loved work less and pleasure more. He extended his circle of acquaintance out of doors, and the agreeable element of female society began to enter more freely into his life. He speculated a little on the turf, in a public-house-parlour way, went to Hampton races with a jovial party, wore a white hat and blue necktie, dressed altogether more smartly than of old, and was often in want of money.

Three hundred a year—that fixed income which Mr. Gurner received from some unknown source—was not enough to support him in idleness and provide him with pleasure. It happens unfortunately for those gay spirits who derive all their gladness from external things, and whose mirth requires to



be stimulated and sustained by perpetual amusement, that a day's pleasure generally costs more than a week's maintenance. The people who get rich are those who are content with the bread-and-cheese of life, and jog on at an even pace through an industrial career, to find themselves, too late perhaps for enjoyment, but not too late for pride, owners of large fortunes.

Jarred's amusements, though coarse, were costly, and the income which, administered by Mrs. Gurner, might have sufficed for comfort and gentility, in Jarred's hands was always running out, and leaving a blank and dismal interval to be supplied somehow.

These periods of dearth were especially irritating to Mr. Gurner's temper, a temper which had never known the curb, but had been allowed from Jarred's earliest boyhood as free and wild a career as that of an untamed mustang on the Texan prairie, and which had been rendered more violent of late by constant alcohol. Even Mrs. Gurner ceased her strophes and antistrophes of lamentation when Jarred was in one of his tempers; for his fits of passion lasted longer than of old, and were less amenable to

the softening influence of hot suppers and gin-and-water. At such times she waited upon him with submissive attention, and was discreetly taciturn, knowing too well how light a breath would fan the smouldering fire into a destroying blaze.

It was early in June, and Voysey-street resounded with the cry of mackerel at three a shilling, when Mr. Gurner came home in the vesper hour, with gloomy aspect and strong symptoms of that moral hydrophobia to which he was subject. That early return to the domestic hearth was in itself an indication of empty pockets; for if Mr. Gurner had been provided with money he would most likely have betaken himself to the Hare and Hounds or to the King's Head at this hour, to solace himself with gin-and-water, 'cold without,' and discuss the odds about the runners in the Hampton races, which were now on, to-morrow being the great day.

Too well did Mrs. Gurner know the meaning of her son's clouded brow, as he swung open the parlour-door, walked past her without a word, and flung himself into his easy-chair by the fireless grate. The matron was drinking tea, with the accompani-

ment of a penny twist, a pat of fresh butter fast reducing itself to oil, and a plate of shrimps too long alienated from their native deep.

‘Upon my soul, the place isn’t fit to live in, mother,’ cried Mr. Gurner, falling foul of these innocent crustaceans. ‘If you must have shrimps, you might as well have them fresh, and not poison my inside with such things as those.’

‘I must take them as they come to Voysey-street, Jarred,’ sighed Mrs. Gurner plaintively. ‘You can’t expect the best of everything in such a neighbourhood as this, a neighbourhood that wasn’t much to boast of when first we came to it, and has been going down ever since as fast as it can go. If you don’t like the shrimps, you’re not called upon to partake of them.’

‘But I am called upon to smell ’em. You’d better go and chuck ’em on the dustheap, if you don’t want to drive me out of the place. It isn’t much of a place for a man to come to at the best of times, without your turning it into a cholera den with unwholesome food.’

Mrs. Gurner groaned feebly, took up the plate

and went out into the back premises, to sacrifice the offending shellfish, which she cast upon the family altar of the dustheap with a regretful sigh.

‘I’m sure I’m not likely to do anything calculated to drive you out of doors, Jarred,’ she said, ‘for I see little enough of you nowadays.’

‘You’d see less if it wasn’t for my infernal luck,’ responded her dutiful son. ‘I ought to have been at Hampton to-day, instead of eating my heart out and kicking my heels up and down Fleet-street, waiting for the telegrams at the *Sporting News* office.’

‘I should have thought you’d seen enough of the consequences of horse-racing to keep clear of it, Jarred,’ moaned the despondent mother.

‘I’ve seen the evil consequences of betting with other people’s money, if that’s what you mean,’ answered Mr. Gurner impatiently; ‘but I’m not going to join in the cant your parsons and such-like talk about the turf, because there are always a certain number of fools who make it their road to ruin. Does anybody fall foul of the Stock Exchange? Yet there are plenty of stockbrokers go to the bad every

year of our lives. Or who stands up to abuse the cotton trade, or the coal trade, or the shipping interest? Yet there are failures enough in all of 'em. Of course I've seen men cleaned out on the turf; and I've seen omnibus cads and butcher's boys make half-a-million of money, and keep their houses in Hyde-park-gardens, through horse-racing. Am I never to try to better myself because men have gone to the bad before me?'

'If horse-racing improved your temper, Jarred, or made you seem happier in your mind, why I might shut my eyes to the experience of the past, and reconcile myself to your enjoying life your own way,' said Mrs. Gurner, venturing somewhat farther than wisdom would have counselled, beguiled by her son's manner, which was moody and despondent rather than violent.

'You'd have had nothing to say against horse-racing, I daresay, if Soapsuds had come in winner to-day, and I'd brought home a pocketful of money.'

'I don't know about that, Jarred; remembering what I remember, I should fancy the sovereigns smelt of Van Diemen's Land.'

‘O Lord, can’t you let bygones be bygones?’ exclaimed Jarred, turning impatiently in his chair, and proceeding to conquer the lingering odours of fish with the fumes of cavendish and virginia. ‘That’s the worst of old people, they remember too much, and are always preaching about the past. It would be a blessed thing for us if we could all have a dip in the waters of Lethe once a year, and come out fresh and lively.’

‘Yes,’ sighed Mrs. Gurner; ‘life would come easier if we could forget.’

‘By the way, mother,’ said Jarred, with a complete change of tone, and something of that agreeable manner which had been wont to distinguish him when things went well, ‘you haven’t paid away that three-pound-ten I gave you for the rates the other day, have you?’

‘The poor-rate collector has been and taken his money, Jarred, which the receipt is on the mantel-piece to confirm my words. The water has not called; but I expect him to-morrow morning.’

‘How much is the water-rate?’

‘One pound three-and-six.’

‘Then you can let me have the money for a day or two, mother. I want to go a little way in the country to-morrow on business, and that’ll just pay my expenses.’

‘It’s your own to do what you please with, of course, Jarred,’ replied Mrs. Gurner reluctantly; ‘but I’m bound to tell you the water will be cut off to-morrow night if the rate isn’t ready when the collector calls.’

‘O, nonsense! We’ve been precious regular lately.’

‘He has called twice already, Jarred.’

‘Very well; the next step will be a summons, I daresay. I’ll pay the rate before the week’s out. Hand us over the money, old lady.’

Mrs. Gurner fumbled in the pocket of her gown, and then in an under pocket, with a slowness particularly exasperating to her son, who pulled at his pipe feverously while he watched her movements. At last, however, she withdrew her skinny hand from that receptacle in her quilted stuff petticoat, and produced some money screwed up in a piece of newspaper, which Jarred straightway pounced upon,

counted at a glance, and dropped into his waistcoat-pocket.

‘Thank you, mother. You needn’t give yourself any uneasiness about the water-rate. If it comes to that,’ he added, seeing the gathering tears in his parent’s faded eyes, ‘you can always turn on the waterworks yourself. There never was such an old party to snivel. Good-night.’

‘Are you going out again, Jarred?’

‘Yes; I’ve an appointment with a fellow who’s going to give me a Teniers to restore, round the corner. I sha’n’t be above an hour.’

‘Ah,’ sighed Mrs. Gurner, as the door banged behind her departing son, ‘I know what Jarred’s hours are. There’s no use in getting him a savoury little bit of supper nowadays. He’s never home in time to eat it, and his appetite wouldn’t do credit to a sparrow.’

Jarred had taken the money from his mother in order to provide for to-morrow’s expenses at Hampton. He had set his heart on going to the races, for he had speculated somewhat heavily on certain events of the day, and he wanted to see his confidence re-



warded, to be there on the spot to know the best or the worst as soon as it could be known. That waiting for tidings on the broiling flags of Fleet-street had sorely tried his impatient spirit.

Had he been wise, even in the pursuit of folly, Jarred Gurner would have asked his mother to give him the money next morning; for once furnished with ready cash, it was not within the compass of his nature to sit quietly at home. He would go round to the King's Head, take a glass of gin-and-water in the skittle-alley, which was a cooler place of resort than the parlour on such an evening as this, and watch the play. He was fully determined not to touch a ball, whatever form social temptation might take; and Jarred, broad-shouldered, long-armed, muscular, was a famous skittle-player. He had lost and won many a shilling at this game; but won oftener than he lost, and might have come off a winner in the long-run had he confined his risks to skittle-playing. It was the betting in the parlour that wrecked him.

He wended his way to his favourite hostelry, a house which looked so clean and cool and respectable

on a summer evening, that a wanderer from some distant sphere, beholding a tavern for the first time, might have supposed it the chosen home of innocence and peace. The shining pewter measures, the pewter counter, the gilded lettering of spirit casks, gleamed in the rosy beams of the setting sun. The spirit of tranquil enjoyment seemed to hover over the scene, as Jarred pushed open the swinging door of that inner temple, the sanctuary of the privileged, known as the order department, and passed thence by a side-door into a shadowy sanded passage which led to the skittle-alley, ordering his refreshment of the attendant nymph at the bar as he went by.

The evening sports were in full swing ; his chosen friends among the players and lookers-on—talk and laughter loud, the lights shining dimly through an atmosphere cloudy with tobacco. Jarred felt that he began to live again, and with him life meant unbridled inclinations, the pleasure of the hour, to be paid for in the future perhaps, and heavily. But these free souls seldom count the cost.

It was eight o'clock when Jarred joined the revellers in the skittle-alley. He left it at half-past

ten, a sadder but not a wiser man, poorer to the extent of the sum reserved for the water-rate, reckless, angry with Fate and with his own fatuity, and with a somewhat unreasonable sense of resentment against Mrs. Gurner for having so weakly yielded up the money which he had demanded from her.

‘If the old woman had only stuck to it till to-morrow morning, I might have had a jolly day at Hampton,’ he said to himself; ‘as it is I’ve very little chance of seeing the races, unless Jobury does the good-natured thing, and gives me a lift in his tax-cart.’

Jobury was a sporting butcher, one of the boldest spirits in Mr. Gurner’s circle, who plunged heavily, and was supposed to be in a fair way to attaining distinction on the turf. There was a vague tradition that Jobury had once had a fourth share in a famous three-year-old, and had just escaped greatness by losing the Derby.

Jarred strolled round to Jobury’s abode, but found that gentleman had not yet placed himself under the shelter of his Penates, but was expected home to supper any time before midnight. Mrs.

Jobury, a depressed and somewhat peevish-looking female, gave Jarred this information reluctantly, and, having given it, slammed the street-door in his face, hardly affording him time to state his intention of favouring Mr. Jobury with a later call. There are wives whose ill-regulated minds cannot appreciate the glories of the turf.

Jarred muttered an imprecation upon his Eumenides, whom he was wont to revile rather than to conciliate, and turned away from Mr. Jobury's threshold, scarcely knowing whither to betake himself. He paused at the street corner to light his pipe, and took a turning which brought him into Goodge-street. He walked down Charles-street and Mortimer-street, crossed Regent-street, and entered the aristocratic region of Cavendish-square. Once here, the inclination to push on to Wimpole-street was too strong to be resisted. He had drunk just enough to make him reckless. True that he was pledged not to approach Dr. Ollivant's dwelling on pain of forfeiting all claim to occasional largesse from that gentleman. But Jarred cherished an inward conviction that, whatever the doctor might

threaten, he, Jarred, possessed just that power to worry his victim which could not be denied—that, however the native manhood of the victim might rise up against him, ready to defy his capacity for working evil, the end would be subjection and subsidy.

This idea, strengthened and sustained by alcohol, fortified Mr. Gurner to-night, as he knocked a spirited double-knock at the doctor's door.

The factotum, who had seen him two or three times before, and regarded him with marked disfavour, looked at him dubiously.

‘The family at home?’

‘The ladies are at the villa at Teddington, sir. My master is in town; but I don't think he will see you at such a late hour as this.’

‘O yes, he will,’ said Jarred, with a swaggering air—he felt a very big man before this meek-voiced butler; ‘he'll see me.’

‘Yes,’ said a voice from the back of the hall, ‘I'll see you. Walk this way, if you please.’

Dr. Ollivant had opened the door of his consulting-room, disturbed perhaps by Jarred's loud knock.

He stood upon the threshold of that sacred chamber, waiting for his guest to pass in.

Jarred was slightly disconcerted by the promptitude of his reception. It would have suited his present temperament better to have had occasion to bluster a little before he obtained admittance.

That very quietude of the doctor's manner chilled him. He took off his hat hastily, and shifted the brim round with a somewhat nervous movement of his ungloved hands.

'I daresay you are rather surprised by the hour of my call, Dr. Ollivant?' he began.

'Not at all; one hardly expects a man of your stamp to be particular about hours. But I am very much surprised that you should come here at all.'

'Why so?'

'Because by so doing you forfeit all claim upon my future consideration. I think I put that to you very clearly when last we met.'

'O, come, I say, doctor,' exclaimed Jarred, flinging himself into one of the substantial morocco-covered chairs—a chair so respectable of make and antecedents that it may well have resented this de-

grading contact with an agonised creak—‘come, I say, doctor,’ repeated Jarred, throwing his hat upon the table as if it had been a glove, ‘let’s talk plain English while we’re about it. There’s nothing like sticking to plain English. What you call future consideration I call hush-money. That’s English. Now, do you mean to say that because, impelled by the force of circumstances’—there was a thickness of utterance, a throatiness, as singers call it, in Jarred’s long words that made him rather difficult to follow just here—‘because I find myself at devilish low water, in a financial sense, and come here to you to ask a favour, as between man and man—I say, as between man and man,’ repeated Jarred, pleased with the phrase, ‘that you mean to turn rusty and say I’m never to get another blessed fiver out of you on account of holding my tongue about that little affair down at Branscomb?’

‘I do mean most emphatically to say that you shall never more have a sixpence from me by way of hush-money; and that I despise myself for having been weak enough to let you make a criminal transaction out of an unhappy accident.’

‘Come, you’ve had the best of it so far. You got rid of a dangerous rival, and you got the lady you were sweet upon.’

‘I’ll trouble you to keep my wife’s name out of the business, and to reserve your speculations upon my affairs. I told you before my marriage that whatever money I gave you henceforth I would give in my own manner and at my own time ; that I acknowledged no claim, and that any approach to persecution on your part would be met on my side by defiance. There may be men who would consent to hold their domestic peace on the sufferance of a scoundrel of your class for a lifetime ; but I am not one of those men. It may be that you have the power to destroy my happiness ; but you must be aware that in so doing you destroy your own chances of future advantage. I am willing to supply you with small sums of money from time to time, since no single amount in the present, however large, would secure you from future want or me from future annoyance. I am willing to do this, on the one condition that you keep your distance, and assail me neither by letter nor by visit.’



‘And suppose I say that I will be bound by no such condition, that I will choose my own time, and be governed by my own necessities, in applying to you for assistance? What would be your answer to that per-p-p-ropersition, Dr. Ollivant?’

‘A very brief and practical answer. I should give you in charge for attempting to extort money.’

‘And stand the racket, eh?’

‘And abide the issue of anything you could say about me. Do you for one moment suppose—looking at my position and at yours—that the world would believe any unlikely story you might tell against me?’

‘I’m not thinking of what the world would believe, Dr. Ollivant. I’m thinking of your wife: how my story would affect *her*. That’s the consideration. She can’t quite have forgotten the young man she kept company with. Come now, I don’t want to be disagreeable, but business is business. I’m bound to attend Hampton races to-morrow, and I haven’t a stiver to pay my fare down or to clear my engagements if things go against me. Give me a ten-pound note, and you shall hear no more of me for the next six months.’

‘You are very obliging ; but I gave you my ultimatum when last you favoured me with a call. I will send you a post-office order for ten pounds on the twenty-ninth of next September, and will send you the same amount on every ensuing quarter-day ; but I will not give you one shilling in this house, or in compliance with an insolent demand.’

‘I didn’t come here to be insolent ; I came here because I was in desperate want of money. Don’t aggravate a man that’s down on his luck, Dr. Ollivant. Unlucky men are reckless, and reckless men are dangerous. I’m unlucky, therefore I’m dangerous. There’s a syllo—syllo—what’s its name for you, doctor.’

‘You have had my answer.’

‘So be it,’ replied Jarred, drawing himself together with the stateliness of intoxication. ‘Remember my syllogy—what’s its name. Ergo, I’m dangerous. Good-night.’

He stalked to the door, like the Ghost in *Hamlet*, holding his hat as though it were that kingly phantom’s truncheon.

‘You’ve given me your ultimatum, I’ve given

you my syllo—syl—lollogism. Good-night,' he murmured thickly; and so departed through the hall and out at the street-door, to the last preserving that air of Hamlet's father, the doctor watching him. Dr. Ollivant rang the bell sharply as the door closed on his visitor.

'Take care never again to admit that person,' he said to the man-of-all-work.

'Yes, sir.'

'He is a man I have assisted, and who has become importunate. Should he press for admittance, at any time you may give him in charge.'

'Certainly, sir.'

Dr. Ollivant went back to his consulting-room—that vault-like chamber lined from floor to ceiling with gravest books, presided over by bronze busts of Galen and Hippocrates, Apollo and Hygieia—that chamber sacred to science and thought, chamber where completest peace had reigned in dull serenity till passion entered there. He sighed as he sat down by the table, where the volume he had been reading lay open under the shaded lamp.

'Thank God she was not in the house!' he said

to himself. 'That man's presence poisons the atmosphere. I'm glad I defied him. He is just the kind of scoundrel to revenge himself at the cost of his own chances, I verily believe; yet I think I had rather the worst should come than go on holding my peace at his mercy. The position was too pitiful. I feel myself a man again, now that I have defied him.'

Then, after a pause of deepest thought, he said :

'Let the worst come, I have been entirely happy. There is something in that. Is the remembrance of departed joy a sorrow's crown of sorrow? I say no. Across the bleakest desert life knows that unforgotten golden land of joy shines like the lights of a distant haven across the barren sea. I am content to die, having been so utterly happy. I have said to the moment, "Tarry, thou art so fair!" Then let the bell of doom sound. Let the last hour strike. I have lived long enough. I have had my day. I can afford to say with Othello :

"If it were now to die,  
'Twere now to be most happy."

He lifted his head from its drooping attitude, and his face was lighted with a gloomy joy.

‘And if he goes to my love, and tells his story—tells it in his own lying fashion—will she believe him, against her experience of me? Will all I have ever been to her pass out of her mind in a moment, and only resentment remain? Will all my love for her be too little to set against a stranger’s slander? Will her foolish fancy for that dead man rise up against me, strong as in the first hour of her sorrow for his loss? Who can reckon the impulses of a woman’s heart? Hers is pure and true and good, but would the affection I have kindled there survive the knowledge of the truth? Would she cleave to me, sinner as I am, and forgive me, as Mary Magdalen was forgiven—because I have loved much? Who can tell? At the worst I am glad I brought matters to an issue. I can tolerate that man as a pensioner, but I will not endure him as a persecutor.’

Dr. Ollivant was to sleep in Wimpole-street that night. He had only returned that afternoon from the North of England, whither he had flown, as fast as express trains could convey him, to attend a noble patient. There was time enough yet, at half-past

eleven, for him to catch the midnight train to Teddington ; but he was not expected there, and it was wiser perhaps to avoid seeing Flora until there had been time for him to recover completely from the agitation of that interview with Mr. Gurner. So, much as he yearned to see the fair young face, to look into the innocent eyes and find hope and comfort and promise of fidelity there, he stayed in the quiet old London house, and sat late into the night reading, knowing how little hope of peaceful slumber there was for him that night.

The clear cold light of earliest morning—a sunless solemn light, like the light of some unknown world—looked in upon him from the open windows of the staircase as he went up to his room, calmer in mind and less expectant of evil than he had been some hours ago.

‘After all,’ he said to himself, ‘the chances against that man betraying me are a hundred to one. He has everything to gain by silence. The sacrifice of the pension I offered him would be too costly an indulgence of malice.’

## CHAPTER IV.

'Je ne sais pas au fond de quelle pyramide  
De bouteilles de vin, au cœur de quel broc vide  
S'est caché le démon qui doit me griser, mais  
Je désespère encore de le trouver jamais.'

LATE as it was when he left Wimpole-street, Jarred Gurner fulfilled his intention of making a second call at Mr. Jobury's, much to the indignation of Mrs. Jobury, who had retired to rest, and was thus deprived of the satisfaction of giving Mr. Gurner what she called a piece of her mind, or in other words, a copious statement of her sentiments upon the subject of a gentleman who worried his friend at an hour when decent people should be in bed and asleep, and whose society was, moreover, at all times eminently injurious and disadvantageous to that friend—who had furthermore borrowed money from that friend, and forgotten to repay it—conduct unworthy of any person calling himself a gentleman, and so on. This jobation, delivered in a shrill soprano, and perhaps culminating in hysterics, Mr.

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Gurner happily escaped through the circumstance of Mrs. Jobury having put her hair in papers and attired herself in her night-rail.

Mr. Joseph Jobury—familiarly known to his friends as Joe Jobury—was smoking a final pipe after a savoury supper of lamb's-fry, cream cheese, and spring onions, which bulbs lent their perfume to the small and somewhat stuffy parlour. But savagely as he had banished Mrs. Gurner's plate of shrimps, Jarred took no objection to Mr. Jobury's onions. He approached his friend with a radiant countenance, greeted him with hearty loudness, and seated himself in Mrs. Jobury's vacant chair with that agreeable freedom from ceremony which constitutes the chief charm of friendship.

'How do, Joe? The missus told you I meant to look in again, I suppose?'

'Yes,' replied the butcher, rubbing his bristly double chin dubiously, 'Mrs. J. did say something about it.'

'Didn't like my coming so late, I fancy. Ladies are so particular about trifles. The fact was, I wanted to see you upon a small personal matter



that couldn't be deferred. Going to the races to-morrow ?'

' Well, yes, I did think of going.'

Mr. Jobury had a receding chin, and an undecided manner which seemed to indicate a certain weakness of character. He was stout, florid, and sandy-haired; had an inept smile, and was renowned among his acquaintance for good nature and a liberal table. Whatever brains he had had gone into horse-racing. Taken away from the turf his intellect was infantine. On the turf he was supposed to be a shining light amongst minor lights, and he had won a good deal of money, almost always winning where Jarred Gurner, who secretly despised him, contrived, with amazing astuteness, to lose. As a butcher Mr. Jobury was nowhere, the business being administered by Mrs. Jobury and the foreman.

' O, you're going, of course,' said Jarred. ' You wouldn't lose such a day as to-morrow. I suppose you've got a seat to spare for an old friend in your trap ?'

' Meaning yourself ?' said Mr. Jobury, with evident embarrassment. ' Well, you see, the trap only

holds two comfortably, and I believe the missus has rather set her heart upon going. She don't often get an outing, and the weather being nice and settled now, it's natural as she should look for a bit of pleasure.'

'Well, for my part, I've always thought women out of place on a racecourse. They haven't any business there; and I can't understand how they can find any pleasure there in being pushed about and feeling themselves in everybody's way. But of course, if Mrs. Jobury has a fancy for going, and if she can reconcile her mind to the amount of bad language she's likely to hear on the road home, and the chances of a fight at Brentford turnpike, it wouldn't become me to advise her against it. The trap will hold four pretty near as well as it will hold two, and I don't mind a back seat.'

Poor Mr. Jobury's countenance expressed extreme perplexity. He had promised his wife that he would have neither act nor part in taking Mr. Gurner to the races; but Mr. Jobury had acquired his name for good-fellowship from a constitutional inability to say no at the right moment. He could not

deny that his tax-cart would hold four, for Jarred had ridden in that vehicle, and knew its capabilities as well as its proprietor. He had not quickness or presence of mind enough to invent any prior engagement : so he was fain to say yes, Jarred should go—even if the missus took objection to his presence and turned ‘rusty’ and stayed at home.

‘I should be the last to interfere with a lady’s pleasure,’ said Jarred, radiant at having gained his point; ‘but upon my word she’ll be better out of it. What enjoyment can it be to a woman to be grilled by a hot sun on a dusty high-road? A man can rough it; but home is the proper sphere for a woman, and the closer she sticks to it the better the world appreciates her.’

This question agreeably settled, the two gentlemen discussed the chances of the morrow, or rather the day, for the midnight hour had sounded from the American clock in Mr. Jobury’s adjacent kitchen, over a friendly glass of gin-and-water, and then Jarred Gurner went back to Voysey-street, hopeful, nay, even confident, though the horses which carried his fortunes were not the horses of Mr. Jobury’s choice.

The day began auspiciously with warm sunshine and a light west wind, and those to whom Hampton races meant no more than a summer holiday, a pleasant drive along suburban roads, where the roses and seringa were abloom in neat villa gardens, and the scent of the limes still lingered in the air ; through Bushey's stately chestnut groves, and the royal village of Hampton Court, past the old-fashioned green, and the grave old red-brick houses, and the barracks, whence come the cheerful notes of the cornet ; along the rustic road and by the bright river--those to whom Hampton races meant pleasure, and not speculation, began the day with hearts as glad as Romeo's when he cried :

'My bosom's lord sits lightly in his throne.'

Not so did Jarred begin the day. Sleep had been an alien from his pillow through the night-hours. He had found no appetite for his morning rasher. The sporting contributor to the *Daily Telegraph* prophesied against his horses. The hopefulness inspired by his last glass of gin-and-water had departed during those tedious night-hours. Carking care consumed him as he walked to Mr. Jobury's dwell-

ing, before which the tax-cart stood ready,—horse, harness, and vehicle alike lustrous from careful cleaning, and a rug, lined with a florid checked material, orange and purple, flung gracefully across the back of the seat.

Mr. Jobury, though attired in a new suit of gray tweed, a blue tie, and a white hat, did not look cheerful, Mrs. Jobury having resented his weakness of character by an acute attack of sulks, which had rendered the breakfast hour far from harmonious. There was the prospect of his return home, too, looming in the distance, when sulks might give place to hysteria and the more demonstrative forms of feminine displeasure. Altogether Mr. Jobury felt that he entered upon the day's delights heavily weighted. Fate, the great handicapper, had been hard upon him.

Thus it happened that both gentlemen sat in thoughtful silence as they drove along the Oxford road, past the tall palaces of the Lancastrian gate, onward to the woods of Holland and the scaffolding of new villas, shooting off at a tangent over against Shepherd's Bush, and on towards Hammersmith-

bridge and the rustic simplicity of Barnes, through classic Richmond, again across the silver Thames, and to that lovely spot which Horace Walpole called the 'county of Twits,' past that verdant corner where the wit built his toyshop château, which a lady's purer taste and larger means have transformed and perfected, on to the glades of Bushey. Even the brilliant performance of Titmouse, Mr. Jobury's thoroughbred mare, descended from some fifth-rate racing celebrity, hardly evoked a fair meed of praise from either of the gentlemen who sat behind her.

They brightened a little, however, as they approached the course, and once arrived on that arena, grew animated enough, and so far recovered their spirits as to be able to do justice to the contents of a picnic-basket which Mrs. Jobury had prepared in the innocence of her heart on the previous day. A choice shoulder of lamb, with mint-sauce carefully provided in a soda-water bottle, a slice of stilton, a crusty twopenny cottage, and a handful of tender young onions, the slim firstlings of the onion tribe, were not unwelcome to the appetites of gentlemen who had breakfasted ill.

'I haven't eaten such a meal for the last three weeks,' exclaimed Jarred, as he washed down the last crumb of cheese with a deep draught of Guinness.

"Why, so ;—being gone, I am a man again."

Jarred's satisfaction was doomed to be brief. The horse he had backed for the next race ran anyhow, or nohow, as Mr. Jobury said. It was lucky for Jarred that the people to whom he had lost money were personal friends, and would be willing to wait a day or so for settlement. The day's results were altogether against him, and the last race left him as completely ruined as a man can be who has very little to lose.

Each disappointment had deepened his gloom. He had drunk deeply, taking all that Mr. Jobury offered him in the way of refreshment, and Mr. Jobury, winning steadily in his pettifogging way, was inclined to be generous.

'Have another b.-and-s., and keep up your spirits, old fellow,' he said every now and then, compassionating that white look of angry despair which had settled upon Jarred's swarthy face. But neither bottled stout nor soda-and-brandy were potent enough

to bring Jarred forgetfulness of his vexations. Intoxication would have been a relief, but to-day strong liquors heated his brain and soured his temper instead of making him gay and reckless. *Il avait le vin triste.*

When Titmouse had been put in the shafts and the worthy butcher was ready to depart, Mr. Gurner announced his intention of returning later, and by rail.

'Lend me a couple of shillings for my ticket, Joe,' he said. 'I've a little bit of business to settle down this way, and I'll go back by train. You may as well make it a crown, by the bye, against contingencies. It won't hurt you if you never see the money again, after your luck to-day.'

'I didn't know you had any friends down this way,' remarked Jobury, handing Jarred the money.

'Ah, you see, I've a larger circle of acquaintance than you gave me credit for. But it's a matter of business, not friendship, that keeps me down here. There, Titmouse is fidgety. Ta-ta, old fellow.'

Mr. Jobury gave the restless Titmouse her head, and drove off at a rattling pace, startling the crowd



through which he cut his way, and vanishing in a white cloud of dust. Jarred took no pains to watch his departure, but turned from the bustle of the racecourse with a darkling countenance, and strolled with heavy laggard steps towards the bridge. Away from the crowd and heat and turmoil of the racecourse, that June eventide was fair enough to have soothed the vexed in spirit. The sun had been shining with his fullest power all day, asserting his might a little too potently for some people, as evidenced by the broiled or melted appearance of the pleasure-seekers who had exposed themselves to his too-ardent rays for the last six or eight hours. But now the day-god's car sloped westward, and a mellow radiance lay upon the land, transforming yonder patch of river, gleaming through rush and alder, into molten gold. There was warmth still, but a genial warmth, tempered by cool breezes that bore the freshness of running waters in their soothing breath. If anything could have made Jarred Gurner comfortable in his mind it might have been that change from the broiling heat of day to the balmy atmosphere of evening, from the press and riot of

the racecourse to the seclusion of that meadow path by which he took his way towards the river.

His mind was all bitterness, but it happened strangely that he was less bitter against destiny for having disappointed him to-day than against Dr. Oliviant for having disappointed him last night. If he had had a ten-pound note in his pocket, his losses, amounting in all to six or seven pounds, might have been endured with comparative stoicism. But that one accessible source of relief having failed him, he saw ruin imminent. The gentlemen with whom he had dealings entertained no exalted views upon the point of honour, but they expected to be paid, and would be merciless towards the man who should essay to cheat them. The name of 'welsher' was an unpleasant distinction, and one that must bar the working of future problems in the mathematics of the turf.

A free indulgence in bottled stout and brandy-and-soda under a burning sun had neither softened Mr. Gurner's temper nor developed his prudence.

'Ten pounds a quarter!' he said to himself, with ineffable scorn; 'ten pounds a quarter, and I'm to keep my distance, and be grateful for his generosity!

Why, the young woman he married brought him sixty thousand down on the nail, and half a dozen words from me would have stopped the marriage—yes, at the church-door. And I knew that, and held my tongue, and now he refuses me a ten-pound note to get me out of a scrape. Does he take me for a worm, and think he can trample on me with impunity?’

Mr. Gurner decapitated a tall cluster of nettles with a swirl of his cane, in very scorn at the question. What he was to do he had in no wise determined, but he was fully resolved upon desperate measures. Dr. Ollivant had forbidden him to reappear in Wimpole-street. Good. He would invade that more remote and sacred domicile at Teddington. Dr. Ollivant had refused to accord him any farther hearing. So be it. He would be heard by Dr. Ollivant’s wife.

‘Teddington—that’s somewhere down by the river,’ mused Mr. Gurner. ‘I’ve heard of Teddington Lock. And his house is pretty sure to be by the riverside, for that’s the pleasantest situation, and he’s rich enough to indulge himself with the best of

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everything—thanks to her money on to the back of his own. Let me see now. My best way will be to get a boatman to row me down.'

He had walked to Hampton-Court-bridge by this time, and here he made a bargain with a waterman to row him as far as Teddington for a couple of shillings.

It was between seven and eight o'clock when the wherry containing Mr. Gurner and his fortunes glided past the quiet gardens of the old Dutch palace—those chestnut groves where his daughter had spent the one bright day of her girlhood. He passed, unheeding and unknowing, by the little inn at Thames Ditton where Loo and the painter had lingered over their one *tête-à-tête* dinner, the rustic garden where Walter Leyburne had thought out the situation and decided against unreasoning love and Loo.

'You don't happen to know the name of Ollivant down yonder below the bridge, do you?' asked Jarred, as they passed Kingston.

'Yes, I do,' answered the boatman, who was a sharp young fellow. 'Red-brick house, near Teddington Lock. They haven't been there long. Gen.

tleman's something in the medical line, I believe. I've seen him and his wife on the water times and often. She's a good deal younger than the gentleman.'

'Yes; those are the people I want to see. The garden goes down to the river, I suppose?'

'Right down. They've got a landing-stage and a boathouse.'

'That's the ticket. You may row me down there as fast as you like.'

'Shall I find her alone,' wondered Jarred, 'or will he be with her? He was in town last night, but that's no reason he shouldn't be down here this evening. I should like to have her all to myself for one quiet half hour, and tell her my own story in plain English.'

Destiny, all day so adverse, favoured this desire of Mr. Gurner's. The boat shot abreast of Dr. Ollivant's villa by and by, and Jarred, in his own phrase, took stock of the place. It wore that look of sleek and smug prosperity which is, of all aspects that wealth can assume, the most aggravating to the vagabond mind. It was an old house—substantially built and simple of design—a house whose colouring

time had mellowed to a sombre depth of hue, a house well covered with climbing roses and a wide-spreading wistaria. The long French windows were all open, affording cheerful glimpses of brightness and colour in the interior; the old-fashioned conservatory, which formed one wing of the house, revealed its wealth of orange-trees and camellias.

Never was grass more carefully shorn than the lawn that sloped to the smiling river; never cedar of Lebanon grander than the fine old tree which sheltered one angle of that lawn; never tresses of willow more luxuriant than those which dipped into the stream beside Dr. Ollivant's landing-stage. A lady clad in white was sitting on a rustic bench under the cedar, a table before her with books and work strewed carelessly upon it. She was alone, and reading, her elbow on the table, her head bent a little, her eyes intent upon her book.

'There you are, my pretty one,' Jarred said to himself, as he scanned the scene from mid-stream, 'and all by yourself too. Nothing could be more convenient. And now, Dr. Ollivant, we'll see who's master of the situation—you or I.'

## CHAPTER V.

'Ah me! I fell; and yet do question make  
What I should do again for such a sake.'

'LAND me at those steps,' said Jarred Gurner to the waterman, handing him a florin.

The man obeyed, somewhat surprised that a person of Mr. Gurner's calibre should be a visitor at that superior-looking villa. He brought his boat close up to the steps.

'Shall I wait for you, sir?'

'Well, yes, perhaps you'd better. I sha'n't be above half an hour, I daresay, and you can land me near the railway station.'

The landing-stage was at some distance from the cedar. Mr. Gurner stepped lightly on shore, looked round the garden, and then approached the spot where Flora sat reading. So far as his keen gaze could discover she was the only occupant of the garden. As he drew near her, he heard voices and laughter from one of the open windows—subdued gentleman-

like mirth, not the strident peals he had been used to hear in the skittle-ground.

He went close up to the little table under the cedar, noiseless of foot as serpent or adder.

‘Mrs. Ollivant,’ he said gently.

He had a pretty clear idea of what he was doing; all the alcohol he had absorbed not having been strong enough to cloud his brain. He knew he was playing a desperate game, perhaps about to throw away fortune for the sake of a petty revenge—a revenge which would taste sweet to him for the moment, but which would not stand by him like the annuity he pretended to despise. But there was just the chance that he might not be allowed to speak, that he might be bought off at the last moment. This was what he desired and hoped. He was here to show that he was prepared for desperate measures, that what he had threatened last night in Wimpole-street he was ready to perform. He was here to measure his strength with Dr. Ollivant.

Flora rose with a startled look.

‘I—I beg your pardon,’ she said; ‘are you a friend of my husband’s?’



‘Your husband and I have had business relations. He is at home, I believe?’

‘Yes, he is in the dining-room with a friend. Do you wish to see him?’

‘Well, yes, presently. But I should like to have a few words with you first, Mrs. Ollivant, if you’ve no objection,’ said Jarred, dropping into a rustic seat close at hand. ‘I’m a stranger to you, I’m aware; but you hardly seem a stranger to me. Our mutual friend Mr. Leyburne used to talk about you so often.’

The delicate cheeks paled suddenly, a distressed look came into the sweet face. Flora took up her work, some trifle of lace and muslin, and began to busy herself with it nervously.

‘Did you know Mr. Leyburne?’ she asked.

‘Intimately. I don’t pretend for a moment that my position in life was on a level with his. He painted pictures that didn’t sell—I earn my living by cleaning other people’s pictures. But he was good enough to treat me as a friend, and I valued his friendship. It was a sad day for me when he met with his death.’

‘Indeed!’

She would not encourage this somewhat disreputable-looking stranger to talk of her dead lover by so much as another question. Her heart was beating painfully: the bitter waters of memory were stirred. She would hardly have supposed the mere mention of the dead could have caused her so keen a pang. She had lived her new life in a new world, and been happy. She had new affections, new hopes, new duties, new obligations. Yet at a word the unforgotten past came back with sharpest pain.

‘Curious thing, rather, his death, wasn’t it?’ asked Jarred, looking at her searchingly.

‘It was a very dreadful thing,’ she said. ‘I would rather not talk of it, if you please. No good can come of recalling past sorrow.’

‘Ah, that’s the way of the world—out of sight, out of mind. We save ourselves the trouble of grieving for our friends by trying our hardest to forget them. The dead don’t rot in their graves so soon as in our hearts. Well, for my part, I can’t forget that poor young fellow—carried off in such a mysterious way. However, it was a lucky stroke for Dr.

Ollivant, since I don't suppose you would have thrown over poor young Leyburne to marry the doctor.'

'I will trouble you not to speculate about me,' said Flora, rising; 'I think you are a very insolent person!'

'I'm sorry for that,' said Jarred. 'Perhaps when you know more about me you'll think differently. I am here to do you a service. I want to say a few words to you in the presence of your husband. Would it be asking too much from you to step indoors and fetch him? I'll wait here.'

Flora paused for a few moments with a puzzled look, and then obeyed the stranger. She felt helpless and alarmed in his presence: he was so different from any one she had ever encountered.

'Who am I to say wants to see him?' she asked.

'Mr. Gurner.'

She gave a little start, remembering the old woman in the purple satin gown—the woman who had spoiled her dream of first love.

'The name seems familiar to you,' said Jarred.

'Yes, I have heard it before,' she answered, leaving him.

Dr. Ollivant and a brother doctor who had come down from town with him were lingering over their claret and strawberries, beguiled by some all-absorbing topic of a somewhat professional and esoteric character.

‘I was just coming out to you, darling,’ said Cuthbert, looking up as his wife entered through the open window. ‘Morley has determined to go back by the 8.50. I was only waiting to wish him good-bye— Why, Flora, how pale you are!’

He rose and went over to her, scrutinising the pallid face with an anxious gaze. How often he had seen Death’s mark upon white cheeks and lips with professional calmness, and the smallest change in her face moved him so deeply!

‘My love, you have been sitting in the sun, or doing something imprudent,’ he said; ‘let me give you a little wine.’

‘Excuse my hurrying off,’ said the visitor, looking at his watch; ‘but time’s up. Good-bye, Mrs. Ollivant; hope your headache will be better to-morrow. The weather’s rather trying. Thanks for a charming afternoon. Good-bye, Ollivant!’

He was gone, to the doctor's satisfaction. He had no thought just now but for his wife. If his love for her and his care for her could know increase, there was a reason now why both should be doubled.

'Dearest,' he said, 'what is amiss?'

'Nothing, dear; or very little. There is a strange man here, on the lawn—he must have come by the river—who wants to see you—a Mr. Gurner.'

'He here?'

'Now you are pale, Cuthbert!' cried Flora, startled by his whitening face.

'My love, we are doomed to pass through a struggle which may darken both our lives. I did not know it was so near. Stay, I'll go to this man alone. Go up-stairs, Flora, and lie down. It is only a business matter. There is nothing that need give you the slightest uneasiness.'

In that moment he had made up his mind to stave off the evil hour, to give the informer his price for his wife's sake. She was not strong enough to bear a great shock. He had not duly considered that last night, not believing that Mr. Gurner meant to bring matters to a crisis.

‘I want to hear what that man has to say, Cuthbert,’ said Flora, with a resolute look that was new to her. ‘Let me hear all and know all. He has been talking to me in such a strange way. He has awakened doubts and suspicions that are worse than certainties. Let me know all—it will be best.’

‘God knows what is best!’ replied her husband. ‘Come with me, if it must be so, and hear the worst, and judge between me and my love.’

He drew her to him and kissed her with deeper passion than in his happiest hour of confidence and love—kissed her as one kisses for whom that kiss may be the last; as Gretchen kissed Faust in the condemned cell; as Bothwell kissed Mary Stuart when they parted at Carberry Hill.

‘Come,’ he said; and they went together to the cedar, where Mr. Gurner sat waiting for them. He had lighted a cigar, one that had been given to him on the racecourse, but he tossed it away half-smoked as the doctor and his wife drew near.

‘Now, Mr. Gurner, I have brought my wife to hear what you want from me,’ said Dr. Ollivant.

‘What do I want? Money! and a good round

sum. I asked you for a ten-pound 'note last night, as between man and man. I want fifty to-night.'

'Do you? And on what ground shall I give you fifty pounds? You are not a particularly estimable person—not a man whose struggles with misfortune form a noble spectacle for the gods. What will my wife think if I give you fifty pounds?'

'I fancy her thoughts will come pretty near the truth; she will think that you would rather I held my tongue than spoke out.'

'I would rather you should speak out,' pursued Dr. Ollivant, with that firm look of his, beneath which the lesser man always quailed. 'My love,' he said to Flora, 'this man is going to make a statement that will shock and wound you deeply; only be assured that what you hear from his lips will be but half truth. You shall hear the whole truth from mine afterwards.'

She trembled a little and drew closer to him. He put his arm round her, holding and sustaining her. How long, how long would she suffer his touch? O, pleasant days! O, life of perfect joy! He felt the delight of life slipping away from him, yet could not

be content to retain it any longer at this scoundrel's sufferance.

‘When I spoke to you just now of your first lover, Mrs. Ollivant—of Walter Leyburne, my friend—I didn’t tell you that I could have spared you all the suspense and uncertainty you suffered at the time of his death. You hoped, and waited, and prayed for his return, I daresay, for ever so long, not knowing for certain what had become of him.’

‘I did—I did.’

Her pale lips shaped the words, but voice there was none.

‘I was a stranger to you and it wasn’t my interest to speak out; but Dr. Ollivant could have spared you a good deal of pain—hope deferred, and that kind of thing—if he had chosen,’ pursued Jarred.

She looked round at her husband, mutely questioning him.

‘Hear him to the end, love, and hear me afterwards.’

She drew herself away from him, and stood alone, and her husband knew that he was doubted.

‘He could have told you all about that unfortunate



young man's death ; but he was wise enough to hold his tongue. He thought that if you knew he had killed your first lover his own chances of winning you would have been rather weak.'

She gave a faint half-stifled cry, and put out her hand to keep her husband back.

' Killed him !'

' Yes. When Mr. Leyburne took his afternoon stroll on the cliff that last day, ill-luck brought him across the path chosen by Dr. Ollivant. They began to talk—about you, I suppose—and soon came to high words. There was a scuffle, and poor Leyburne fell off the cliff. I won't say he was pushed off ; but it looked rather like it to me.'

' You were there—you saw—'

' I was on the sands below—heard voices and quarrelling, and saw your lover fall. That is all.'

' And he,' pointing to the doctor, 'bribed you—paid you to keep this secret?'

' Well, yes, he has rewarded my discretion pretty well, up to last night. You won't believe my statement, perhaps ; but if you want confirmation, look at him.'

Jarred pointed in his turn at the doctor, who stood like a rock, but with a face of deadliest pallor.

‘Go,’ he said to Jarred. ‘You have done your worst; there is no more to be said. You came here by the river, I think. Be good enough to let me see you off my premises.’

There was nothing for Jarred to do but follow the doctor to the landing-stage, where the gaily-painted wherry was waiting for him. He descended to his boat without a word, feeling that he had played rather a poor game after all. To the last he had expected Dr. Ollivant to surrender—to buy his silence at any price when the crisis came. But the crisis was past, and Jarred felt that he had made a fool of himself.

Cuthbert Ollivant went back to the cedar. His wife was standing just as he had left her, rigid, her eyes fixed on vacancy.

‘Hear my story now, Flora,’ he said pleadingly.

She did not look at him as she answered,

‘How much am I to believe from so accomplished a deceiver?’

‘Believe the simple truth. Walter Leyburne’s

death was purely accidental. No one, not even you'—with a touch of bitterness—'could regret it more than I did. True that our voices were heard in dispute; true that we wrestled on the verge of that horrid cliff—'twas he attacked me, remember—and that he fell on the slippery grass. The single blow I struck was in self-defence.'

'And it killed him,' said Flora icily.

The anguish of these moments had transformed her. She was no longer the gentle girlish wife he had known an hour ago. There was a slow bitterness in every accent that changed the very sound of her voice, a cold glitter in her eye that altered the very character of her beauty. So might Electra have looked, changed from her innocent girlhood by the horror of domestic murder.

'That blow could have done no more than stun him, at worst; the rest was accident.'

'Which you concealed as studiously as if it had been deliberate murder. And you let me wait, and you let me hope, and you let me wonder—knowing that he was dead, and that his death was your work.'

'False, cowardly, vile—was it not? Find the

worst name that you can for my crime ; it will not be too bad. But remember that all was done for love of you. I sinned, as I would sin again, for your love's sake. I could not shut myself out from all hope by telling you the truth. What chance would there have been for me if I had been candid ? And this death-stroke of Fate, which I had not even desired, gave me my chance. I had always said to myself, " Were he away I could win her." How could I speak ? You would have hated me if you had known.'

'Perhaps,' she answered, still without looking at him, 'but not so deeply as I hate you now. And that would have been an unjust hatred. This is just and godly—hatred of a liar, hatred of a coward.'

Hard words from one whom nature had made so gentle. The doctor stood silent, wondering at her cruelty. Could that old love be so much, and all that had been since then so little ? Was all his love for her—all their happiness, which for him meant so much—to weigh for nothing against the memory of that light fickle lover ?

'You do not measure your words,' he said with a

new coldness. 'I see that the old love was the stronger after all. You have heard the truth, as God hears and judges us. There was no desire in my heart to injure so much as a hair of his head; but I could not let the manner of his death bar my road to happiness. I was willing to be a liar for your sake. For your sake I was a coward. Is that a reason you should hate me?'

'It is,' she answered; and then went on with sudden tears: 'My father blessed us on his death-bed—blessed us, and joined our hands in his dying hour. It pleased me to think that I was obeying his last wish when I married you. Do you think he would have put your hand in mine if he had known what I know now?'

'He rewarded my great love. Would that love have seemed less to him if he had known my sin?'

'My father was an honourable man.'

'That will do, Flora. I see that the old love was strongest. All our days, and dreams, and hopes cannot weigh against the mere memory of that—no, not even that holiest bond which should make us one, although I were the greatest sinner

upon earth. You despise me, you hate me. Your heart, so tender by nature, can find no pity for my guilt; although I sinned for love of you, although I am lost for love of you. I never knew the meaning of the word sorrow till I knew you. I never knew what pain was till I loved you. I have given you my peaceful days, my desires, my dreams—given you all God ever gave me of hope or joy. But these things cannot weigh against inclination. You loved Walter Leyburne; you have only endured me. It is an old story. Good-bye, my love; I will torment you no more. This house shall be sacred to you henceforward. My mother shall stay here as your housekeeper and companion, if you will allow her; but my shadow shall darken your threshold no more.'

He took her hand, which she left passive in his grasp, pressed it to his lips, and let it fall. And so, without another word, he left her. A brief farewell; and yet, so far as he could see through the thick darkness of his future life, it was to be for ever.

He went into the house, found his mother, and sent her to Flora. There was nothing in his manner

to alarm Mrs. Ollivant. He had recovered his self-command, looked at his time-table for the train that would convey him back to London, and left his house so quietly and deliberately, that no one who saw him depart that evening would have guessed that he was leaving his happiness behind him.

## CHAPTER VI.

'O, is it thyself that I mourn,  
Or is it that dream of my heart  
Which glides from the reach of my scorn,  
And soars from the clay that thou art?'

THE bright midsummer days grew warmer. Thickets of bush roses, moss and cabbage and maiden's blush, that had been growing for half a century; rose-clad arches and trellised walks; rank and file of standard, with all the latest achievements of the rose-grower—all were in their glory of bloom and colour in the gardens of the villa near Teddington Lock; but Flora's tranquil wedded life was over. It had vanished like a dream when one awakeneth. She told herself that it was best so, as she paced the rose-walks slowly, feeling a little less strength for that gentle walk day by day, or stood on the grassy bank above the river, looking dreamily down at the swift-flowing water. She told herself that



there was no other way but life-long parting for her and Cuthbert Ollivant.

Her first thought on that dreadful evening—her first thought when her brain cleared from the bewilderment of the shock—had been a longing for loneliness ; to find some solitary place, where no one would question or attempt to solace her pain. All that she had esteemed and loved had been suddenly reft from her. The man she had trusted was proved a liar. She did not believe Jarred Gurner's word against her husband's—she did not believe Cuthbert Ollivant to have been a murderer ; but, on his own confession, he had been concerned in Walter's death, and had hidden his knowledge of the fact, and had deliberately lied to her. Never more could she respect or trust him ; never more could she look up to him with childlike reverential feeling, wondering what such a man could find to love in her.

Since that night of torture she had been left in perfect peace. Mrs. Ollivant had been all kindness, but had asked no questions. She had been, perhaps, warned against interference with that silent grief. Life went on as smoothly, and almost as silently, as

in one of those enchanted castles, set deep in the mysterious heart of a pathless forest, which abound in fairy lore. Nothing was changed, except that the doctor remained away. There was no longer the excitement of bidding him good-bye in the morning after driving him to the station in a pony-carriage, and of expecting his return to dinner, when he brought back all the news of the day, and, as it were, the very spirit and zest of metropolitan life along with him. It was strange what a blank his absence made in the house, and how everything seemed altered, where other change there was none. It was as if some one were lying dead in one of those empty rooms up-stairs. And yet Flora told herself it was best that it should be so; that Dr. Ollivant had been infinitely wise in severing himself from her so promptly; that union between them must henceforward be of all things the most impossible. She had told him in the passion of the moment that she hated him, and in her own mind she had not reversed the sentence.

She recalled that miserable time at Branscomb, the dreary days that followed Walter's disappearance.

She dwelt on every detail of those days with a morbid grief. How she had wondered—how she had waited—while he, who knew the truth, pretended to sympathise and to assist; sent telegrams which he knew to be useless; took counsel with Mark as to the best thing to be done; kept up the pretence of ignorance with unabashed hypocrisy. Could she do less than hate him, remembering this?

And yet, despite this loathing of his falsehood, and even hatred of himself as the very incarnation of falsehood, how cruelly she missed him! how empty and purposeless her life seemed without him! If she took up a book, and tried to lose herself in a world beyond her own petty circle of perplexities and regrets, she could but remember how her mind had been little more than a sheet of blank paper before Dr. Ollivant began to cultivate it; how much he had taught her; how infinitely he had widened her possibilities of happiness; how patient, how careful, how tenderly indulgent he had been through all the cloudless days of her wedded life; exacting so little, giving so much; humble, and taking her love as a boon.

But he had been so vile a sinner—for her sake—that it was impossible she could ever think of him again save with scorn and abhorrence.

‘What did he gain by all that deceit?’ she asked herself. ‘What did he gain by degrading himself so deeply? Only me.’

She wondered at her own worthlessness, which to this man had been above all price, even above the cost of honour and truth. She pitied him for having bartered so rich a pearl for such tinsel.

‘There are hundreds of women in London prettier and more agreeable than I am; and yet for my sake—just to win such a foolish girl for his wife—he was content to sink so low!’

The enigma puzzled her, and she pitied him a little for having been so foolish.

Mrs. Ollivant behaved admirably. Her son had written her a long letter, but had explained nothing. A misunderstanding had arisen between him and Flora, he told her, which would, he hoped, be temporary; nothing that his mother or any one else could do or say would alter the state of the case, he added, foreseeing intervention and worry; events

must take their course. He begged his mother to stay at Teddington, and do all in her power to make his dear wife's existence happy, trusting to Providence for a happy issue out of present perplexities. He went on to give careful and business-like instructions for the carrying on of affairs at the villa, with a thoughtfulness that was almost woman-like.

Dull, empty days. The summer roses bloomed and withered, and all the grass was strewn with petals; but Flora, whose delight it had been to gather and arrange them, left bowls and vases empty, and suffered the flowers to die ungathered; until Mrs. Ollivant came to the rescue, and made a daily raid, in a strictly business-like manner, with big garden-scissors and capacious basket. That tranquil repose and silence of the house became beyond measure melancholy. There were sunlight and warmth and flowers and brightness and colour throughout the rooms, and the garden and glancing river outside the windows, but voices and laughter were mute; for the occasional speech of the two ladies seemed hardly to stir the silence. When she was not roaming listlessly in the garden, Flora spent

her hours on a sofa reading ; or musing, with her eyes fixed upon one particular patch of carpet or wall.

There was a restraint between the two women, truly as they loved each other. In all their conversations each feared to touch some perilous point, and thus their talk became of necessity studied commonplace. Every day Flora grew more languid, and less inclined for even these poor little intervals of talk. The local surgeon whom Dr. Ollivant had intrusted with the care of his wife's health—an elderly man, of good standing in his profession—opined that this languor and lowness of spirits were only natural—to be expected at such a time.

'I wish Dr. Ollivant could give you more of his society,' said the surgeon, Mr. Chalfont, in his cheerful tone ; 'that would brighten you a little, no doubt. But of course, with his extensive practice, it is impossible ; a man in his position is the slave of his own reputation.'

Mr. Chalfont was completely ignorant of the fact that Dr. Ollivant had ceased altogether to come to the Willows.

One day he gently reproved his patient on account of certain red circles which disfigured her pretty eyes.

‘I am very much afraid we have been crying,’ he said with a shocked air. ‘Now, really this will not do. Mrs. Ollivant’—appealing to the elder lady—‘you must not allow this. Tranquillity of mind just now is most essential; and, surrounded as we are by all that can render life happy, why should there be any tears? We must go out more; we must get more fresh air.’

Flora promised, with a pathetic little smile, that there should be no more tears.

‘I wish to obey you,’ she faltered, ‘for—for the sake of—’ And here broke into a sob that alarmed the family doctor.

For whose sake—for whom had she to live? What charm, or hope, or pride, or glory, could life hold for her henceforward?

‘Hysterical,’ murmured Mr. Chalfont.

He prescribed for the hysteria, and sent his patient one of those mild solutions of ether or ammonia which are supposed to regulate the throb of

foolish hearts, and tranquillise the pulses fluttered by a mind ill at ease; the sort of anodyne which, in a more advanced stage of civilisation, Shakespeare's physician would have insisted upon sending to Macbeth by way of practical reply to the usurper's famous question.

A week later Dr. Ollivant received a telegram early one morning from his faithful friend at Teddington.

Providence had permitted him to be a father only for one brief hour. The eyes of his infant son had opened on life's bleak morning for so brief a span that the father was unable to see their brightness. All had happened prematurely, and in the dead of night. His wife lived, but was very weak, the telegram informed him. .

He was at the Willows as soon as cab and train could convey him there. He stood in the darkened chamber, with its summer coolness and perfume of many roses, bending over the little waxen form of his first-born, his mother beside him, weeping their mutual blighted hopes.

'I should have been so fond of him, so proud of



him, Cuthbert ; and he was so like you,' sobbed the disappointed grandmother.

Dr. Ollivant smiled ever so faintly. There was little in that baby-face, so pale and flower-like—a snowdrop half unfolded—to recall the stern mould of his own features.

His wife's room was on the opposite side of the corridor, only a few paces distant, but there he dared not enter. She was very weak ; there was no danger, Mr. Chalfont told him—he had brought down one of the most distinguished practitioners in London to confirm Mr. Chalfont's opinion—but the utmost care was needed.

'Then I will not see her,' said Dr. Ollivant.

'But, my dear sir, surely your presence—a few consoling words from you—'

'Might cause undue agitation,' interrupted Dr. Ollivant. 'Does she seem much grieved by the loss of her child?'

'Well, so far as I can discover from her manner, not acutely. She moaned a little when your mother told her of the infant's death, and murmured something indistinctly ; but she has shed no tears for the

poor little fellow. There seems a general depression of mind, rather than any passionate grief. As she recovers strength we must endeavour to cheer and rouse her. I am sorry to see you so deeply affected by your loss, my dear sir,' added Mr. Chalfont, compassionating that look of fixed trouble in the doctor's face—a certain hopeless look not to be mistaken.

'Yes, it is a great disappointment. My poor little boy! It would have been sweet to me to work for him, to think of him in my loneliest hours. My son! It is hard to say those words only of the dead. My son!'

He stayed at the Willows all that day and all night, but took care that Flora should be ignorant of his presence. All night he sat alone in the room adjoining that solemn chamber where his dead child lay; and once in the dead of the night, and once in the faint gray of the early morning, he went in and knelt by the little bed.

'I accept Thy chastisement of my sin, O Lord,' he said; 'but let not the burden of my wrong-doing fall upon my innocent wife!'

Never perhaps in all his life had he made so direct

an appeal to his Creator and Judge ; never before had prayer so earnest, so utterly sincere, gone forth from those worldly lips.

He received the blow that had fallen upon him in all humility, but the stroke was not the less heavy. He had counted upon winning his child's affections in the days to come, although he might never regain the love of his wife. The child would be a link between them, even though he, the husband, remained hateful in Flora's eyes ; a tie that must needs draw them together sometimes, though their looks and words might be cold when they met.

For more than a week Flora's state was precarious, and in all that time Dr. Ollivant came to and fro, spending every hour that he could spare from his professional duties at the Willows ; resting little, full of anxiety and care, watchful of nurses and doctor, but never entering his wife's room. When she had taken a fortunate turn, and was progressing entirely to Mr. Chalfont's satisfaction, Dr. Ollivant went back to Wimpole-street for good, as hopeless as a man can well be and yet bear the burden of life.

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Flora came slowly back to life and care. She had been only half conscious of existence during her illness ; too weak for grief, almost too weak for memory. Returning strength brought a renewal of her woes. Again she recalled the past, and brooded over her sorrow and her wrongs, and thought of her murdered lover—it was thus she called him in her heart, although she had never doubted her husband's version of the story. That accident, in her mind, was murder. If those two had never quarrelled, if there had been no lurking hatred of Walter in the doctor's mind, that accident would not have happened. Evil feeling had been the root of all.

But deeply as she deplored her first lover's hard fate—cut off untimely in the blossom of his days—robbed of fame and all bright things that earth can give—and earth, although roundly abused in a general way, has a good many pleasant things to bestow—deeply as she lamented the cruel fate of genius and youth, her keenest anguish was the knowledge of her husband's dishonour. She had thought him so good and great, so high above her girlish weakness ; and by this one base deception—not the sin of a moment,

but the sustained lie of years—he had placed himself in the dust under her feet, had by this one great treachery made all his other virtues worthless. All that he had been to her meant nothing now. He was taken out of her life and her memory. There was no such man upon earth as that Cuthbert Ollivant she had revered and loved; not with the girlish unreasoning devotion she gave the young painter, born of a girl's day-dreams and fancies, but with a woman's riper and holier affection.

Health returned, and strength in moderate measure; but there was a lack of that vitality which was to be expected in so young a patient. Mr. Chalfont attributed this joyless languor to grief for the baby's death, and came to the conclusion that change of air and scene would be beneficial to Flora.

'A month or six weeks at the seaside,' he suggested; 'in some nice bracing air—Bridlington or Scarborough.'

'I detest the seaside!' said Flora petulantly. That sweetness of temper which had been one of her chief graces was not always to be counted upon now.

She was fretful and impatient at times, impatient even of kindness when it was inopportune.

‘You are tired of some watering-places, perhaps,’ persevered Mr. Chalfont; ‘but you would be interested in a place that was quite new to you. The Yorkshire coast, for instance.’

‘Yorkshire!’ ejaculated Flora; ‘there is something hateful even in the name. It sounds cold and barren. I shiver at the very thought of it.’

‘Now, really this is fanciful, my dear young lady, remonstrated the patient doctor; ‘we’ll say no more about Yorkshire, however. The grand point is that you should have change of scene.’

‘I don’t care for change of scene. I like the Willows better than any other place, or as well as any other place,’ replied the patient wearily.

‘It is only natural you should feel attached to such a delightful home. But for your health’s sake I strongly advise—nay, with Dr. Ollivant’s concurrence, I shall venture to order—a complete change of scene. If you don’t like the idea of an English watering-place, suppose you were to go farther afield. To some German spa, for instance, or to the Swiss lakes.’

‘I shouldn’t care about going abroad,’ Flora answered in the same listless way, ‘and I don’t think mamma would like to go so far ; would you, dear ?’ with a gentle look at the patient mother-in-law.

‘My love, I would go anywhere for your good,’ said Mrs. Ollivant.

‘O mamma, that was said so like Cuthbert !’

The old name came unawares. For just one moment Flora had forgotten all save that the mother’s devoted love was like the son’s. She turned her head upon the sofa-pillows to hide her sudden tears.

‘Highly nervous,’ murmured the doctor, with a glance at the elder lady. ‘Suppose you leave everything to me, my dear lady,’ he went on blandly to Flora, ‘and I will contrive to have a little chat with your husband, and arrange matters, subject to his advice. He is generally at home in the evening, I suppose ?’

‘Not just now,’ said Mrs. Ollivant, colouring ; ‘he is too busy.’

‘Ah, the slave of his own greatness ! Well, in that case I will slip up to town and see him there.’

‘Why should I go away, mamma, and cause you

more care and trouble?' asked Flora, when Mr. Chalfont had left them. 'Why should I try to prolong a life which is useless to all the world and only a burden to myself?'

'My dearest Flora, you know that to two people at least your life is a treasure above all price. O Flora, why are you so foolish? What is the meaning of this estrangement between you and my son? He has forbidden me to speak, but I think I have kept silence too long. I have been mistaken in my obedience to him. I see you unhappy. I know that he is most wretched. If you had seen him when you were ill—'

Mrs. Ollivant checked herself, but too late. The secret was out. Flora had raised herself from her pillows and was looking curiously at the speaker.

'What, mamma? Did you see him while I was ill? He came here, then?'

'He did, Flora; but I was told not to mention his coming. He was here night and day till all peril was past.'

'But he would not see me. He kept his word. Mamma, you must never talk of him to me again. It



is useless. We have bid each other an eternal farewell. Go back to him, if you like. I have no right to take you away from him, to divide mother and son. Let me go anywhere, mamma; I will live with any people Dr. Ollivant chooses for my guardians. I will obey him in all things.'

'But can you never be his happy wife again, Flora?'

'Never, mamma.'

'Try to remember how happy your life was before this miserable estrangement.'

'Try to remember! Do you suppose I have ever forgotten?'

There was much more said, all to the same purpose; Mrs. Ollivant pleading eloquently. Was she not pleading for that which was most precious to her in this mortal life—her son's happiness? But she argued in vain. Flora answered with a sweet sad calmness. Of all impossible things there was nothing more impossible than reunion for these two.

Mr. Chalfont called in Wimpole-street that evening. He found the doctor alone among his books in the vault-like consulting-room. The house had

already fallen away from its perfect freshness and neatness, for lack of Mrs. Ollivant's vigilant care. The geraniums in the hall-window looked seared and yellow ; there was dust on the shining hall-table ; the umbrella-stand was disfigured by a charwoman's bloated gingham.

But the worst and most visible change was in Dr. Ollivant himself. He looked older by ten years than he had looked six months ago in the early spring, when he had been busy with the furnishing and improvements at the Willows.

He started up from his desk at sight of the Teddington surgeon, alarm in his look and gesture.

'My dear sir,' cried Mr. Chalfont, 'I am no messenger of ill news. Our patient is going on very nicely. But I have come up to town in order to have half an hour's quiet chat with you. Upon my word, you appear more in need of my services than your sweet wife. You are looking far from well.'

'I am rather fagged,' replied Dr. Ollivant carelessly.

'Burning the candle at both ends, I fear.'

'Meaning the candle of life? Well, I don't

know that one need regret that, provided one makes a blaze. That double flame has its effect on one's generation, and if it doesn't last quite so long as the steadier light—'

He finished his sentence with a careless shrug of his shoulders. Mr. Chalfont, looking at him from a professional point of view, did not at all approve of his appearance.

'You want rest, my dear sir,' he murmured soothingly. 'If you could manage to take a holiday now, were it only for a week or two, and accompany your dear wife to some agreeable resort—'

'Impossible,' said the other shortly. 'But you came here to talk of my wife, not of me.'

Mr. Chalfont, thus called to order, stated his case plainly. His sweet young patient's health was decidedly improved, but there was still a want of vigour. The rebound was not what he had expected. She was evidently fretting for the loss of her infant. Natural, very, remarked Mr. Chalfont from the philosophical standpoint of a man who had had to deplore the loss of a good many infants during his professional career, and did not find himself much

the worse for that affliction. Change of scene was indispensable.

‘Let her go to whatever spot on earth is fairest in her fancy,’ said Dr. Ollivant. ‘My mother shall go with her, and all that forethought, care, and money can do shall be done to assure her comfort.’

Then followed a discussion as to where the patient should be taken, since, according to Mr. Chalfont’s showing, she had no wish of her own—nay, was positively apathetic upon the subject.

‘Scotland,’ suggested the family doctor. ‘Too cold perhaps.’

‘Decidedly too cold.’

‘Nice, or Cannes.’

‘Too warm.’

‘Biarritz, the Pyrenees.’

‘Too far. I could not bear to think of her so distant from me, unless it were her own especial wish.’

‘She is entirely indifferent to locality. What do you say to Ireland?’

‘I suppose you mean Killarney?’ said Dr. Ollivant. ‘English people generally do when they talk about Ireland in the tourist’s sense.’

‘Certainly. Mrs. Chalfont and I spent a week there a few years ago, and we were charmed with all we saw. The scenery is really something beyond description, and the cuisine of the hotel where we stayed was excellent. I don’t think I ever enjoyed myself so much. The air is lovely—mild, pure, invigorating. I really feel inclined—always with your approval—to recommend Killarney.’

‘Let her go to Killarney, then, if she likes.’

‘If you could only contrive to accompany her,’ urged Mr. Chalfont.

‘Out of the question,’ replied the doctor wearily, as if he were annoyed at having the suggestion repeated.

## CHAPTER VII.

‘As there is much beast and some devil in man, so is there some angel and some good in him.’

‘The modern majesty consists in work. What a man can do is his greatest ornament, and he always consults his dignity by doing it.’

THAT satisfaction which unregenerate man derives from having given free indulgence to his evil passions, having poured the strong wine of vengeance into a cup and drunk the draught to the lees, is not a lasting content. The fiery flavour is pleasant enough for the moment, but the strength of the drink soon evaporates in the chilling atmosphere of reason. As to all commoner orgies there comes the gray light of to-morrow’s dawn, so to this drunkenness of angry passion comes also the morrow, when the man who last night flung all his chances of advantage away for the brief rapture of revenge begins to reckon on consequences, and to consider whether he has not bought his triumph a little too dearly.

Jarred Gurner went back to Voysey-street in every way a loser.

'I've done it,' he said to himself very often, pride sustaining him just for a little while against the sense of loss. 'He didn't think it was in me, perhaps. I've done it. I've shown him that a man's a man for a' that, and a' that, and twice as mickle as a' that,' muttered Mr. Gurner, snapping his fingers defiantly at the empty air.

Then in his fine baritone voice—husky, but still a noble organ—he trolled out the bold defiant words : a brave man's defiance of adverse fate and an adverse world :

'What though on hamely fare we dine,  
Wear hodden gray, and a' that ;  
Gie fools their silks, and knaves their wine,  
A man's a man for a' that !

For a' that, and a' that,  
Their tinsel show and a' that,  
The honest man, though e'er so poor,  
Is king o' men for a' that !'

Voysey-street resounded with the full ripe tones of that voice, which might have made a better man's fortune. It was past eleven, and the last beer had been fetched, and the public-houses were closing

somewhat noisily, as Jarred returned to his domicile. He found his mother standing in the doorway, gazing dreamily into the street.

‘What, sitting up for me, old lady?’ he asked, with an air of jollity which was somewhat spurious. He wanted to persuade himself that he was not sorry for the evening’s work, that he did not think himself an abject blockhead; and in this desire to stand well with himself he even went so far out of his way as to be civil to his mother.

‘Yes, Jarred; I felt a little low this evening. The weather was so warm, and the sunset was all gold and rose-colour over Cave-square; it put into my mind the lives of people who enjoy themselves in nice country-places in such weather, and that made my life seem rather hard. Perhaps I give way more than I ought; but if it’s in one’s nature to be sensitive it’s difficult to fight against one’s feelings. I hope you had a pleasant day, Jarred.’

‘Not particularly pleasant. Perhaps if you knew the feelings of people who go out pleasuring, you wouldn’t think it so hard to stay at home.’

His manner was kinder, his words were more



frank, than usual. Mrs. Gurner felt absolutely cheered.

‘I thought perhaps you might come home hungry, and want a nice little bit of supper, Jarred,’ she said. ‘Oysters are out, but it isn’t too late for me to get a lobster round the corner, and there’s a lettuce on the stones in the scullery.’

‘No, thank you, mother. I haven’t appetite enough for a strawberry-ice. But I should like a glass of gin-and-water cold, if you happen to have a drop of spirit in the house.’

‘Yes, Jarred ; there’s a little gin in the cupboard ; I fetched it yesterday for my inside.’

‘People generally do take it that way, don’t they, mother, internally ?’

‘I mean that my inside was bad, Jarred, or, I should not have partaken of any spirit,’ replied Mrs. Gurner with dignity.

They went into the parlour, where a guttering tallow candle flared in the gloom. It did not look by any means as cheery or comfortable as the same room two or three years ago, in the winter-time, when the fire was blazing merrily, and Loo’s dark

eyes reflected the blaze. Jarred sat down wearily, giving himself up to reflection, while his mother went to the tap to fetch a jug of cold water.

Perhaps those words of the poet's had inspired him with a new sense of manliness, for at this moment he felt almost glad that he had destroyed his future chances of gain from Dr. Ollivant. He had felt himself so debased, such a paltry creeping scoundrel, every time he approached his victim and advanced the spy's claim for hush-money. He had seemed to himself worse than the informers who go about after lawful hours obtaining beer from innocent publicans.

Perhaps there is no depth to which a man can sink so low as to render him unconscious of his fall. The helpless victims who are born in social debasement, created in the night of poverty and degradation, may indeed be ignorant of their state; but the man who has known the light of education, who has fallen from something better, can he forget?

Just as Cuthbert Ollivant, even amidst his agony, had rejoiced at having shaken himself free from his persecutor, so Jarred Gurner, with ruin staring him

in the face, felt some touch of pride, some sense of recovered manhood, in the knowledge that he had flung away his chances of extorting money from the doctor.

But ruin did stare him in the face, nevertheless, and Mr. Gurner awoke from the sensuous sloth of his later life, and came to the conclusion that he must work, and work his hardest, work against time, in order to pay the money he had lost on Hampton racecourse to-day.

‘If I could find that blessed Straduarious back,’ mused Jarred, scratching his head meditatively, as he thought of the violin lying in pieces up-stairs—violin for the skilful manipulation of which he had been offered a five-pound note. ‘There’s no swindling old Ahasuerus,’ he said to himself, thinking of his client, an ancient dealer in musical instruments in the neighbourhood of Leicester-square, who pretended to remember Corelli, and on this and other grounds was popularly supposed to be the Wandering Jew. ‘He knows every mark in the grain of that fiddle-back, I’ll be bound. If I could only find it. People don’t eat violin-backs ; it must be some-

where about the house, unless the second floor's children have got hold of it, and made it into a toy-cart or a battledoor.'

Stimulated to exertion by stern necessity, Mr. Gurner resolved upon hunting for the missing piece of wood early to-morrow morning. He drank a tumbler of weak gin-and-water, conversed with his mother quite sociably, and left that lady to the retirement of the back parlour and the press-bedstead, in a happier frame of mind than was her wont.

He rose at ten next morning, which for his late habits was an early hour; and before indulging in the luxuries of toilet or breakfast, set to work, honestly and earnestly, to hunt for the Straduarus back. This quest involved the complete turning-out of his workshop,—all the dusty corners, the heaps of odds and ends and accumulated rubbish on the piano, the bills and circulars and forgotten letters, and old cigar-boxes and cracked tobacco-jars, and oil-bottles and varnish-rags, and old boots laid aside because it was a doubtful question whether they were worth the cost of cobbler's work.

'I wish I had Loo here to help me,' he thought,

as he paused with a despairing glance at the chaos of rubbish which he had shifted from one place to another, without having introduced anything like order into the arrangement thereof. As with all domestic litter, there was much that he could not make up his mind to throw away. 'No, I won't be so bad a father as to wish her back again, poor lass!' he went on; 'she's better off where she is. But this place 'was never such a den in her time. And if the old lady attempts to put things square she's pretty sure to hide half of 'em. I daresay she's at the bottom of my losing that unlucky Straduarus.'

By and by, working with more patience than was usual with him, Mr. Gurner—like Herakles when he had turned the course of the rivers Alpheius and Peneius—began to see something like order around him. The useless varnish- and oil-rags were thrown into a heap for burning; the old boots were set out in a row for studious contemplation; the cigar-boxes were emptied of their odds and ends—old buttons, old steel pens, fragments of sealing-wax, broken wafers, shreds of tobacco; the tatterdemalion books were set up on their shelf, looking like Falstaff's ragged regiment.

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Jarred considered his morning's work with a sigh. It was something, perhaps, to have set his room to rights; but he had lost all hope of ever finding the Straduarus back.

'And yet I'll swear I never took it out of this room,' he said to himself. 'It must be those confounded brats up-stairs.'

It was his habit to lock the door of this sanctum and put the key in his pocket when he went out, now that Loo was no longer there to protect his belongings, but he occasionally omitted that precautionary measure. One of those children from the second floor must have crept in one day, on an exploring expedition, and stolen the violin-back.

He had questioned Mrs. Gurner closely as to her knowledge of the missing object, but upon this subject Mrs. Gurner's mind was a blank.

'You ought to know that I never throw away a shred or a scrap of anything in your room, Jarred,' she said reproachfully.

'Perhaps not, mother; but you might have poked it away into some corner.'

Now, however, the corners had all been turned

out, and Jarred no longer cherished any hope that the Straduarus lurked among the dust and lumber of his apartment.

He invoked something which was the reverse of a blessing on the unconscious heads of his lodger's children, and sat down, gloomy of aspect, the only ray of hope which had lighted his pathway quenched in darkness.

'I could have finished the violin by Saturday night,' he thought, 'and Ahasuerus's fiver would have put all things square.'

He placed himself before the row of shabby boots, and began the task of inspection. His wardrobe was getting weak in this particular, and it had come to a question of soling and heeling. Foremost in the rank stood a pair of wellingtons—boots of which Jarred had been proud in his time. True that wellingtons have been left behind in the progress of fashion; but, as Jarred was wont to remark, there was always something in a wellington which made it superior to all other boots. He looked at those tall and lordly boots despondently. They bulged a little at the sides, and too faithfully reproduced in a per-

manent form all blemishes and faulty bosses in the foot of the wearer. They were boots of which Jarred could hardly feel proud, even though the souther's art might make them sound and weather-tight.

'They'll pay for repair anyhow,' he said to himself with resignation, and took up one of the once-lovely boots.

The toe hitched the loose top of the battered old piano, and half lifted it.

'By Jove,' ejaculated Jarred, 'I never looked inside the piano.'

He had opened it in another instant—nay, dragged off the front, with its faded red-silk flutings and broken brasswork, as if he had been about to tune the instrument. Yes, there lay the Straduarinus back, behind the rusty wires, just as it had fallen, most likely, when Mrs. Gurner cleaned the room—an operation she performed at long intervals, in concert with the girl.

Jarred ran to the head of the stairs, and called over the balusters :

'Send me up some strong tea and a rasher,



mother; and bring me a bundle of firewood to melt some glue. I'm going in for a long day's work.'

He felt more appetite than he had known for a long time—felt his strength and his manhood renewed. There is a wholesome flavour in honest work, which freshens even the most faded spirits.

He began his task at once with glues and varnishes and oils, whistling to himself softly as he worked, and with the artist's pleasure in his art—not a very exalted art, perhaps, that of the violin-doctor, and in somewise allied to chicanery, yet a kind of art notwithstanding. He was going to create something, were it only a spurious fiddle.

Mrs. Gurner brought her son's breakfast with her own hands, proud and happy to wait upon him when he condescended to smile.

'I've found the violin-back in that blessed old hurdy-gurdy,' said Jarred, pointing to the superannuated instrument. 'You must have dropped it in there some day when you were at your confounded cleaning.'

Mrs. Gurner protested that only 'the girl' could

have been capable of so stupid an act. 'It's like her,' she remarked ; and Jarred said no more.

'You can get me a bit of dinner by five o'clock, old lady,' he said, doing justice to the rasher and poached egg. 'I daresay I shall have got up an appetite by that time.'

'I hope so, Jarred. It does my heart good to see you partake of your food with a relish, and it seems like old times to see you at work here. Would you like a bit of roast lamb and half a peck of peas?—they're only just in, and young and tender.'

'What you like, mother. I haven't a sixpence to give you.'

'Never mind, Jarred ; I can get the lamb on trust at Simmons's.'

Mr. Gurner worked on indefatigably for four or five hours, whistling softly to himself as he laboured, pleased with his own skill. 'This fiddle will be worth a hundred guineas to old Ahasuerus,' he said, as he scraped and polished, and gave deeper tones to the colour of the wood.

He ate his dinner with much enjoyment, praised his mother's cooking, and made himself generally

agreeable. Even when he had smoked his after-dinner pipe, and Mrs. Gurner was prepared to see him take his departure, he still sat on. That delightful society he was wont to seek had just now lost its charm for him, since in the circle of his intimates he was likely to meet the men to whom he was indebted, and to a man of Mr. Gurner's fine mind a debt of honour was intolerable. He could have faced an angry water-rate collector, could have suffered the worst penalties of the county court without a pang, but he could not brook so much as a whisper of that vile epithet 'welsher.'

So he sat in his back-parlour, smoking and turning over the leaves of a dilapidated old sporting magazine.

'I do believe your stopping at home has been lucky to me, Jarred,' said his mother presently. 'I had a bit of good fortune to-day.'

'Did you now? Found some silver screwed up in a bit of paper in some of the crockery yonder, I suppose. I never knew such an old party for screwing up money in bits of newspaper.'

'No, Jarred. I have too many calls for money to

mislay it. That wasn't my good luck. You know that handsome voylet-coloured satin in the window?

'Know it!' exclaimed Jarred contemptuously; 'I know it as well as I do the union-jack, and am about as tired of seeing it.'

'Well, Jarred, your eyes will never be offended by it again; though I do say—long as it has been upon my hands—a handsomer dress was never offered a bargain. I've sold it.'

'Have you? Why, then, I shall begin to believe in Dr. Cumming, and that the end of the world isn't far off.'

'It's all very well to have your joke, Jarred, but it isn't my fault if business isn't brisker. The fact is, there's no money to spare in Voysey-street, or the dress wouldn't have hung in my window so long.'

'How did you manage to get rid of it at last?' asked Jarred carelessly.

'Well, it was about half an hour after I'd taken up your breakfast, and I was dusting this room, while the girl shelled the peas, when I heard the shop-door bell go tinkle tinkle, timid-like. "Ah," thinks I, "it's one of your wandering Christians, as some

one calls 'em, come to ask the price of half the things in my shop, with no more intention of buying than of leaving me an independency;" so I gave a sort of a groan and went to see who it was.'

Mrs. Gurner paused to give effect to her narration, allowing a brief interval of suspense, with a view of stimulating her hearer's interest.

'Who should it be, Jarred, but old Mrs. Hagstock, Mrs. Simmons's mother; a very respectable old lady, who lives over at Simmons's, and helps to keep things straight, Mrs. Simmons's time being taken up with the business and her young family. Well, she wishes me good-morning, and I return the compliment, and ask her to take a chair; and then she ups and tells me that her youngest grandson—a fine baby, for I saw him in his mother's arms this morning when I went over to pick that shoulder of lamb—is to be christened to-morrow, and she wanted to look the lady at the ceremony, and there was to be a tea-party in the evening; and then she says: "To put it plainly with you, Mrs. Gurner, what is the lowest you can take for that plum-coloured satin, if so be that it's my length?"'

Here again Mrs. Gurner paused for oratorical effect.

‘Well, Jarred, I measured the skirt against her, and it was full three inches on the ground, which would allow for taking off a piece at the gathers, where the satin was a trifle rubbed. “Mrs. Hagstock,” says I, “with every wish to oblige you, I couldn’t in justice to myself and family take less than fifty shillings for that dress. It would be wasted breath,” says I, “to praise the quality of the satin; if it doesn’t stand alone it’s only because no dress ever did stand alone. There—they don’t make such satins nowadays,” says I. Upon which that artful old woman turned round upon me and said it was an old-fashioned colour. “It’s like old china,” says I, “if it *is* old-fashioned. It’s a colour and a quality that you can’t get for love or money.”’

‘Never mind what you said to the old lady, and what the old lady said to you, mother. How much did you screw out of her?’

‘Well, after half an hour’s talk, she brought out one pound seventeen-and-six. I believe it was every penny she had in the world, Jarred, so I let her have

the dress. And with the white Paisley shawl she was married in, and has kept laid by ever since, she'll look quite the lady to-morrow. I think I shall step round to the church and have a peep at her, just to see how the satin looks upon her.'

'It might be a novelty to you to see the inside of a church, certainly,' replied Jarred jocosely.

The Voysey-street people were not great church-goers, preferring as a rule to devote their Sabbath mornings to culinary operations, and their Sabbath evenings to a friendly gossip on their door-steps, or a summer stroll to the Regent's Park.

The violin was finished by Saturday, and the violin-doctor received his price from Mr. Ahasuerus, who paid the money ungrudgingly and promised more work.

'Corelli never played upon a better instrument,' said the old gentleman as he put the fiddle to his shoulder and ran a bow lightly across the strings. And from that hour he almost believed that the violin was a genuine Straduarinus, or rather he made believe so well that he only just escaped self-deception.

Jarred felt ever so much more of a man as he

walked away from Leicester-square with five sovereigns of hard-earned money in his waistcoat-pocket. Twenty, nay fifty, pounds extorted from Dr. Ollivant could not have done him half so much good. He went back to his accustomed haunt—the parlour at the King's Head—with his crest erect, met his creditors with a bold and open front, paid so much of his debt as he could, and promised to pay the balance before the next week was out. Conduct so honourable to manhood elicited the applause of the parlour, and Jarred might have regaled himself at the expense of his friends to a dangerous extent had he been so minded.

For once in a way, however, Mr. Gurner was proof against temptation. He took no more than was consistent with a liberal interpretation of that valuable virtue sobriety, and walked back to Voyseystreet, still erect of mien and clear of speech, a few minutes before eleven.

In the semi-darkness of the passage he encountered his mother in a state of wild excitement.

'O Jarred,' she exclaimed, 'wonders will never cease! There's such a surprise for you.'



‘Lord bless the old lady, she’s all of a twitter!’ cried Jarred. ‘What surprise?’

‘Loo!’

He waited for not another word, but pushed past his mother and dashed into the parlour.

There, in the shabby little dimly-lighted room, stood a lady, dressed in fawn-coloured silk—a fabric with deep shades of brown and bright flashes of gold in its lustrous folds; a dress fashioned with a grandiose simplicity; voluminous, flowing, artistic; not a style after *Le Follet* or Mr. Worth, but rather after Titian and his contemporaries. The lady’s raven hair formed a splendid coronal at the top of her well-shaped head; her olive complexion was vividly contrasted by a ribbon of deepest blue, which showed above the lace ruffle she wore about her neck; a single sapphire shone darkly bright in each small ear. Loo, indeed, but a changed and glorified Loo; a Loo who had never been seen in Voysey-street before to-night.

‘My girl,’ cried Jarred rapturously, as he clasped her in his arms, ‘why, what a beauty you have grown!’

‘Do you really think I’ve improved, father?’ she asked shyly.

‘Improved! Why, I haven’t seen your match for many a day. Didn’t I always tell you there were the makings of a fine woman in you? But I didn’t suppose you’d turn out such a stunner. And what a surprise to see you here to-night, Loo, when I thought you were in Naples! Egad, if I’d known you’d been nearer I should have written to ask you to help me out of a difficulty, though it is against the rules in that case made and provided. But tell me what brought you to England.’

And then father and daughter sat down side by side, and talked together confidentially—Loo with all her old fondness for the scampish father she had slaved for and admired in the years that were gone. They sat and talked together freely, happily, with unrestrained words, with unclouded brows; which could hardly have been possible to either if Voysey-street had been correct in its least charitable suppositions as to Louisa’s history.

## CHAPTER VIII.

'Et je pleurais, seul, loin des yeux du monde,  
Mon pauvre amour enseveli.'

'This shadowy desert, unfrequented woods,  
I better brook than flourishing peopled towns :  
Here can I sit alone, unseen of any,  
And to the nightingale's complaining notes  
Tune my distresses, and record my woes.'

IN the drowsy August weather, just when the heat and glory of the vanishing summer seemed most potent, Mrs. Ollivant and her daughter-in-law found themselves at Killarney; the solemn mountains closing round them, and shutting out all the busy world beyond; the quiet lakes stretched before them, sunlit, placid, unutterably beautiful; and all the gentle voices of nature crying peace to that troubled heart, where there was no peace.

Dr. Ollivant, who with calm and hidden sway ruled the travellers' movements, had protested against his wife's residence in an hotel. Vain for Mr. Chalfont to assure him that the Killarney hotels are delightful,

that in them the visitor could enjoy seclusion the most complete, or the pleasantest society; Dr. Ollivant would have none of them.

‘My wife shall go to no place where pleasant society is a possibility,’ he said grimly. ‘I don’t want her driven into an untimely grave.’

Mr. Chalfont sighed, and plaintively reminded the doctor that there were pleasures of the table to be enjoyed at a well-organised *table-d’hôte*, which could hardly be assured in any private establishment. ‘And the dinners they gave us at Killarney were really most superior,’ urged the family practitioner.

‘Were they worthy of Lucullus or Brillat Savarin, my wife should not eat at a public table,’ answered Dr. Ollivant decisively. ‘We must get a cottage somewhere near the lakes.’

‘I don’t think that will be easy,’ said Mr. Chalfont.

It was not easy; but after a good deal of correspondence, chiefly by telegraph, whereby all waste of time was avoided, Dr. Ollivant heard of a place that appeared suitable. It was a rustic cottage near Muckcross, with windows commanding a view of the

middle lake—a cottage with a garden where all beautiful things grew with the rich luxuriance common to that favoured soil. Climbing roses covered the gray-stone walls, mountain ashes spread their leafy plumage above the lawn, spicy carnations and mig-nonette filled the old-fashioned borders, glossy arbutus leaves screened the low house from adverse winds. No more sheltered nook could have been found amidst those romantic scenes.

So far as a mind ill at ease may be charmed with external beauty, Flora was charmed with Killarney. But for the eyes of the sorrowful, all things take one dull dead hue, or else by their brightness and beauty aggravate the keen sense of pain. Just as Flora had felt at Branscomb after Walter's disappearance she felt here. It was so hard to be miserable in a world so full of beauty. Vainly did Mrs. Ollivant, guide-book in hand, expound the features of the scene; vainly endeavour to awaken in her companion that conscientious and painstaking admiration of nature which is the first duty of the tourist. Flora turned her languid eyes from Torc to Mangerton, and did not even know which was which.

‘My love,’ said her mother-in-law seriously, ‘it is not the least use coming to a place of this kind unless you take the trouble to appreciate the scenery, and at any rate learn the names of the objects around you. You remembered all you saw in Rome—the Coliseum, and Trajan’s what’s-its-name.’

‘Yes, mamma, but I was happy then,’ sighed Flora. ‘Cuthbert used to read bits of an English Tacitus to me as we sat among the ruins, till Rome seemed peopled with the dead. And we used to talk about Virgil and Horace, and the Rome they knew, before the old gods were dead; and then he would quote that lament of Alfred de Musset’s, in *Rolla*. Or he would take out a pocket volume of Shakespeare, and read a scene from one of the Roman plays. Yes, I was happy then,’ she concluded with a sigh.

‘And you will be happy again,’ said Mrs. Ollivant. ‘It is not possible for two people who love each other to remain estranged for ever.’

‘I *did* love him, mamma. I never knew how well until—’

‘Until I discovered him unworthy of my love,’ she would have said, but left the sentence incom-

plete, and only ended it with a sigh. She could not speak against the son to the mother—above all to a mother who sacrificed so much out of affection for her.

It was a sleepy kind of existence which the two ladies led in that rustic retreat by the lake. Flora was hardly strong enough, yet, for the regular round of excursions, easy as locomotion is made for the pleasure-seeker at Killarney. She allowed herself to be rowed about the lakes, and appeared to feel a languid pleasure in the slow movement of the boat, the gentle ripple of summer waves, the still beauty of the scene. She would spend long hours with her books on lovely Inisfallen, while Mrs. Ollivant, to whom actual idleness meant martyrdom, worked untiringly at a pair of Berlin-wool slippers for her son—slippers which the unluxurious doctor would permit to adorn his dressing-room, but rarely deign to wear. Here, in this green retreat of the monks of old, Flora would muse over Horace or Hugo, Byron or De Musset, and ever and anon, with bitterest sigh, remember who had taught her to appreciate the greatest authors, and to make other tongues as her own.

Whom did she most regret in these sad hours of secret mourning? The lover her childish fancy had chosen, and whom Fate and evil passions had reft from her untimely, or the husband of her womanhood? Easy to answer that question. Whose image was it that most haunted her? Whose looks and tones recurred with every familiar page, with every favourite passage in her chosen poets? Whose but those of the master and guide who had formed her mind, and filled her dreams with fairest fancies? It was of Cuthbert she thought; it was Cuthbert she mourned. That Cuthbert for whom she had avowed her hatred, from whom she had separated her life for ever. Hard to break a tie that had endured through more than a year of happy married life—a tie that had begun to be woven long before her marriage, in those sad days when she awoke from darkest fever-dreams, in a strange house, and asked Cuthbert Ollivant what had become of her father. From that hour—yes, from the first hour of her orphanhood—he had been all the world to her—his the single all-sustaining love which her weak nature needed; he the deeply-rooted oak upon which



she could hang, poor parasite as she was, in the utter womanliness of her character. Without him her life fell into ruin, or became a mere segment of life, purposeless, meaningless; not life at all, but simply endurance; a dull suffering of days and nights, sunrise and sunset, warmth and cold; existence as mindless and hopeless as that of the cattle on the hill-side, and without their animal joy in living.

Sometimes she would close her book with a short sudden sigh, that was like a stifled sob, and rise from her moss-grown bank, and walk away from the spot where her calm duenna worked little criss-cross stitches with Berlin wool, and put in a few beads here and there, and admired the effect of her labours, and was happy. Flora would wander away in the green solitude, and lean her head against one of the great ash-trunks, and shed secret tears—tears of love and pity and regret—for the husband for whose falsehood she had declared her hatred and her contempt. Bitter were those tears, for they were shed in utter hopelessness.

‘If God would let me die!’ That was her only

prayer. But in spite of hidden tears, of nights that were half unrest, the sweet soft air of Kerry did its work of healing. The languid eyes regained some of their old light, the oval cheek recovered its delicate bloom. As Flora grew stronger, the two ladies wandered farther afield; they climbed Mangerton and looked down upon the glorious panorama of hills and waters; they spent long days on the laurel-shaded banks of that mighty cascade which comes rushing down from the summit of Mangerton; Flora botanising, Mrs. Ollivant steadfast to the slippers. They penetrated the Gap of Dunloe, and rode their trusty ponies into the Black Valley; and from the time she first beheld it this lonely vale was Flora's favourite resort. The gloomy grandeur of the scene seemed in harmony with sad thoughts; the solitude soothed her. By degrees, Mrs. Ollivant came to understand that it might be better sometimes to let Flora wander alone, or at least with no other companion than the sturdy guide who led her pony over the rough bits of road, and told her the legends that belonged to every crag and peak. And Mrs. Ollivant, having punctiliously followed the precepts of the

guide-book, felt that she had done her duty to Killarney, and in her heart of hearts preferred sitting in the shade of a weeping ash on the lawn, reading her favourite Wordsworth, or grounding dear Cuthbert's slippers, to the more exhausting pleasures that appertain to the worship of nature.

So Flora crossed the lake in a little boat reserved for her especial use, and on the other side found her pony in the charge of a faithful *gossoon*, her liege retainer, and rode thence to the Black Valley, that awful amphitheatre of hills, which even on the sunniest day has an aspect of all-abiding gloom. Here she would roam at will, while the guide, who was discreet enough to know when he was not wanted, sat on some green knoll and busied himself with the fabrication of salmon flies, being a man of infinite resources. The few inhabitants of that romantic solitude grew to be familiar with the pretty young English lady. The bright-faced girls loved to talk to her, the women brought her goat's milk, the children gathered ferns and wild-flowers for her. The very dogs fawned upon her, and entreated her notice. She was nearer happiness in these lonely rambles

than she had ever been since that dreadful June evening at the Willows, when Jarred Gurner revealed her husband's baseness.

Here, in this grand and melancholy scene, her soul rose to its loftier level. That old selfish lament — 'He saw my grief, he saw me endure the agony of hope deferred, the sickening tortures of suspense, and he went on deceiving me'—was forgotten. She thought of her husband for the first time with unalloyed pity. He was so far from her, so utterly divided ! She could survey his conduct more calmly from this distance. She looked back as to a past life, and saw him with eyes that were no longer passion-blinded. It was for her sake he had sinned. Let her think of him ever so unkindly, she could not quite shut that fact out of her mind. For her sake, to win her love, he had been false to himself. It was not in his nature to stoop, it was not in his nature to deceive ; and for her sake he had made himself a liar and a hypocrite. She recalled those moments of gloom which had puzzled and distressed her—dark moods that had stolen upon her husband even in their sunniest hours—depression which he had re-

ferred to professional anxieties. She could understand now that he had suffered for his sin; the burden of his falsehood had not sat lightly upon him; all that was noble in his soul had revolted against that one great meanness.

‘And it was for my sake,’ she told herself. Many women would have been proud of such a passion; just as Cleopatra may have been proud when her warrior-lover bartered his glory for her worthless love, and followed her vanishing sails, and told her that worlds won or lost counted less than one tear of hers.

Sometimes Flora thought of her husband with such settled and hopeless sorrow as she might have felt for the very dead—for one whose days and wrongs were done, whose memory only remained to be cherished or despised. But there were other moments, when her fancy pictured him in his lonely life, and her heart ached for his forlornness.

‘How strange the house must seem!’ she thought, picturing to herself those familiar rooms in Wimpole-street. The Willows, she knew, was given over to the care of servants; her husband was not likely to

go there. 'How strange and how lonely that stiff London house must look!—worse than when I first saw it, and wondered at its cold primness—much worse for Cuthbert now that his mother is no longer there to keep him company. He will sit in his consulting-room half through the night, reading those dreadful medical books—English and French and German. What horrid creatures we must be, when so many doctors can find so much to write about our diseases! Poor Cuthbert! It seems such a dreary life. But it is only the same kind of existence he led before papa came home from Australia. It could not matter to him very much; if it were not that we have been so happy.' And she remembered those famous lines they two had so often read together:

Nessun maggior dolore,  
Che ricordarsi del tempo felici  
Nella miseria.'

## CHAPTER IX.

'She spoke with passion after pause—And were it wisely done  
If we who cannot gaze above, should walk the earth alone?  
If we whose virtue is so weak should have a will so strong,  
And stand blind on the rocks to choose the right path from the  
wrong?

To choose perhaps a lovelit hearth, instead of love and heaven,—  
A single rose, for a rose-tree which beareth seven times seven?  
A rose that droppeth from the hand, that fadeth in the breast,  
Until, in grieving for the worst, we learn what is the best !'

THEY had been more than a month at Muckcross, and the first leaflets of autumn were beginning to fall lightly on the mossy turf, and in the park-like roads where the pine-trees shed their cones on the path. Flora's improved health was an agreeable subject for Mrs. Ollivant to enlarge upon in her letters to her son, and she little dreamed how many a pang she inflicted on the lonely worker when she discoursed of his wife's brightening cheeks, quiet slumbers, and improved spirits. There are wounds whose pain the tenderest touch can only irritate. Reading those

cheerful letters in the dull solitude of his consulting-room, by the gray London light, Cuthbert Ollivant thought how shallow a soul this must be, whose griefs mountain scenery and fresh air could cure—how frail the tie which had bound his young wife to him, when its severance left so slight a scar.

‘I have prayed God for her happiness,’ he said to himself afterwards, ashamed of this selfish pang. ‘Am I weak enough to be sorry that my prayer has been heard? Let me think of her tenderly, as the thorn-tree may remember the summer butterfly that floated about its rough branches for a noontide, brightening and beautifying it for a little while, and then soaring away to the flowers.’

‘Had we not better go back to the Willows, mamma?’ Flora asked one morning. ‘You must be anxious to see that all is right.’

She could not bring herself to speak of her husband; but it was of the mother’s desire to see her son she was thinking.

‘Well, yes, my love, I shall be very glad to see poor Cuthbert again. His letters are so short and so far apart, and altogether so unsatisfactory, that I am



naturally rather anxious about him. It is more than a week since I heard last. And then there are the servants at the Willows. It isn't quite a wise thing to leave them alone so long; yet it seems cruel to take you away, while the warm weather lasts, for you seem so fond of the place.'

'I do like it very much, mamma; it is so sweet and sad and solitary; but I am ready to go back whenever you please. I wish to obey you, dear mamma; for, believe me,' with a broken sob, 'I am anxious to make up to you in some small measure for all the sacrifices you have made for me.'

'Do not speak of them, dearest. It is true that I should like to be with Cuthbert, but he wishes me to be with you; and I have never thwarted any wish of his. And then I look forward with hope—'

'Do not hope anything for me, mamma; I have done with hope.'

'You said the same two years ago, dear, in your grief; yet you have known some happy hours since then.'

Flora turned from her with a sigh. It was thus she ended all consolatory arguments. But she did

not forget the mother's anxiety to see her son, the housekeeper's concern for her household.

'I believe I am quite well now, mamma,' she said; 'well enough to satisfy Mr. Chalfont, and to do without his eternal tonics; so we may as well go home as soon as you like.'

'Then I'll write to Mary Anne to-day, and see about the packing to-morrow,' replied Mrs. Ollivant delightedly.

Packing with her was a solemn business, that occupied at least two days, and demanded serious thought.

The Mary Anne to whom she was going to announce her return was a somewhat antiquated female, who had been housemaid and parlourmaid in the quiet establishment at Long Sutton; one of those household treasures, an old servant.

Flora went out alone that afternoon, for one of her last rambles, more regretful at leaving this tranquil retreat than she would have liked her mother-in-law to know. She had not been happy here; but she had been at peace. There had been nothing

to remind her of her past life, with its shifting lights, its dark shadows. To return to the Willows was to go back to the empty husk of her lost happiness. Not an object in that house, which Cuthbert Ollivant had been so glad to adorn for her, but would remind her of how much she had lost in losing him.

Pleasant to open the little gate that led into the sacred precincts of the abbey, unfollowed by the juvenile guardian of the shrine, for whom Flora was a privileged person. How still and calm and holy was that ancient place of tombs, all nature's wildest fairest growth beautifying and sheltering it—deep grass, greenest mosses, gray lichen, ruddy strawberry leaves ; the ferns grown tall and rank in their autumnal maturity, the wild honeysuckle exhaling its latest breath in perfume, the berries brightening to deepest red on mountain ash and arbutus, the first yellowing leaves upon poplar and plane, the creeping blue bird's-eye stealing in and out among loftier weeds, purple foxgloves lifting their slender spires among the ferns.

Flora moved softly through the deep grass to her .

favourite nook, awed, no less than on her first entrance here, by the solemn beauty of the scene. She had her chosen spot—a quiet corner of the burial-ground—where she could sit for hours, hidden by the angle of a great square tomb, and out of the beat of exploring tourists. The boy who guarded the place knew her retreat, and was careful to keep strangers away from it. She seated herself on a humble mossy old grave beside the loftier tomb, and opened her book—her beloved Dante, almost every page scored and annotated with her husband's pencil. He had taught her Italian out of Dante, just as he had taught her Latin out of Horace. There were his careful notes on the margin of each page, every obscurity made clear, every rugged line made smooth. They had read their favourite pages together in Italy, where climate and landscape lent reality to the verse, and Dante's poem seemed to take new grandeur from Dante's land. To-day she turned the leaves slowly, finding it a hard thing to keep her ideas from wandering far from the page.

‘If I had never known the truth I might still

have been happy,' she thought, brooding upon that revelation of Jarred Gurner's. She had been so happy just before that evil day, looking forward with unutterable hopes to the time when her baby would smile upon her—when Cuthbert would be proud and glad with the pride and gladness of a father—when all the world would seem brighter for those two, because of the new bright life that would be theirs to cherish and adore. As a child thinks of its first doll, a maiden of her first lover, Flora had thought of the child that was to be given to her arms; and lo, death had claimed the unopened bud, and sent it to blossom in a fairer, holier land.

She closed her volume with a despairing sigh. All the wide world of poetry could not comfort her, or beguile her thoughts from her own little life and its great grief. Francesca and her lover were but empty shadows; and if they had loved and suffered verily in their day she could hardly pity them. Suffering seemed the common lot of humanity. All the horrors of the dreamer's underworld could not awaken her interest. Ugolino was simply a bore. She tossed the book aside impatiently, and gave her-

self up to musing on her own troubles. What was she to do with that empty remnant of her life, which remained to be got rid of somehow?

The rustle of a woman's dress sweeping over the long grass roused her from this gloomy reverie, after it had lasted some time. She looked up, and saw a lady approaching; young, tall, handsome, and O, so happy-looking—a woman who looked as if her world was all sunshine. She came quickly along, looking about her admiringly, uttering a little exclamation of delight now and then, involuntarily, for she had no one to whom to communicate her rapture. She was very handsome, quite in a different style from Flora's flower-like beauty; whereby Flora, as was natural, admired her intensely. This stranger was a brunette, with an olive complexion, and eyes that were darker than a starless night. She had a sweet smiling mouth, and white teeth that showed a little between the red slightly-parted lips. She was dressed in soft Indian silk, of a yellowish hue, which harmonised wonderfully with the rich colouring of her somewhat Spanish beauty; and in her gray-felt hat there was a scarlet plume,

fastened with a broad silver buckle—just such a hat as one sees in some of Vandyke's portraits. A scarlet shawl—a real Indian fabric—embroidered with gold-coloured silk, hung carelessly upon her shoulders, and a large umbrella of the same material as her dress sheltered her from the sun. In one hand she carried a flat japanned colour-box, and this, to Flora's surprise, she deposited among the strawberry-plants and ivy upon the stone tomb. She was going to sketch, evidently; but where was her sketch-book? Flora watched her movements with languid curiosity. Having laid down her paint-box, the lady looked about her for a minute or so, and then mounted one of the low graves, and looked across the burial-ground, and called, 'Toinette, Toinette!' whereupon a shrill voice with a very decided twang responded, 'M' voici, m'd'me! j'viens, m'd'me;' and then a much smaller voice, also shrill, cried, 'Mam—mam—mam—man!' and anon a young person in a neat cambric cap appeared, stumbling over the graves, and through the long grass and brambles, carrying a large portfolio and an artist's camp-stool, and with a very small child—

all white and scarlet, like a tropical bird—hanging on to her dress.

‘Come to mamma, darling,’ cried the lady; and presently the little eighteen-months-old toddler was lifted in her strong young arms, and held up in the sunlight, cooing, laughing, joyous, and crying, ‘Gain, maman, ’gain!’—meaning that the tossing operation, however fatiguing to the operator, was to be continued until farther notice.

Hot tears welled up into Flora’s eyes, and she turned her face against the tomb which concealed her from the strangers, to hide those streaming eyes from the light. Happy mother, happy child! Over her baby’s narrow grave the summer flowers had bloomed and faded. She had never held him in her arms, never seen his sweet blue eyes. Why were some people so happy in this world, she asked, and she so miserable? A common question which poor humanity is prone to address to Fate. The camp-stool was provided with a big canvas umbrella; there was also a portable easel, which the lady arranged with extreme care and precision, while the French bonne rambled about with the child, showing



it the flowers and trees and tombs, with perpetual exclamations in the style of Maguelon and Yveline, in *Nos Bons Villageois*.

‘I think that will do,’ said the lady to herself, after arranging and rearranging the easel, and shifting the big umbrella two or three times.

‘What a fuss she makes about her things!’ thought Flora; ‘she ought to be a very great artist for her sketch to be worth all this preparation.’

But the lady made no sign of beginning work. She walked in and out among the low graves, looked at the view from every point, paused to survey her preparations, smiled approvingly.

‘I think he will like this spot,’ she murmured. ‘That angle of the abbey stands out so well against the foliage. What a lovely background for one of his subjects! He might paint as good a picture as Millais’ Huguenots; just two lovers meeting or parting in front of yonder ruined wall, and every bit of lichen and ivy on that old tomb standing sharply out in the clear air.’

‘O,’ thought Flora, ‘all these preparations are for some one else—her husband perhaps.’

She thought of the brief happy days at Branscomb, in that bygone life of hers, when she too had busied herself with a painter's paraphernalia, and arranged the pencils and dabbled with the colours belonging to that Raffaele in embryo, Mr. Walter Leyburne.

'How foolish I was in those days!' she mused, pitying her fond girlish delusions; 'and if that old woman told the truth, he never really cared for me. Poor papa almost asked him to propose to me, I daresay;' blushing hotly at the humiliating idea.

And then she thought of that young lover's awful death; hurled in one moment from the sunlight and glory of this world to tragic instantaneous death; horrible death, perchance; for who could tell what endurance of agony might not be concentrated in that awful moment? The sun shining on the smiling summer fields, the skylark carolling in heaven's unclouded vault; and below that bright glad world the awful illimitable gulf men call the grave.

'How could my husband ever be happy, remembering that hour?' she wondered. 'How could he ever feel himself less than a murderer?'

She lapsed into gloomy thought, and forgot the strange lady, who, after fluttering about a little, now here, now there, disappeared from that corner of the burial-ground, leaving the easel and umbrella ready for the coming worker. Flora looked up presently, slightly curious about any lover of that art she loved so well. She thought of her own portfolios and sketching-gear, lying idle in her pretty morning-room at the Willows. She had not touched pencil or brushes since that cruel hour when the bright thread of life was broken. Old pursuits could delight her no longer; life's joy-bells were out of tune. Yet she was too much an artist in her small way to behold that easel and colour-box without some faint interest, and she watched for the coming of the painter.

'I don't think I should ever have cared for him if he hadn't been a painter,' she mused, remembering how her interest in the young stranger in the velvet coat had first been aroused, in the far-away time when she used to look out of the window in Fitzroy-square, that stony dreary quadrangle which to her fancy was the finest square in London.

A footfall came softly across the deep grass, the odour of a choice havannah polluted the sweet flower-scented air. The artist was approaching.

She looked up curiously from her snug retreat in the angle made by the tomb and low fern-fringed wall. He too wore a velvet coat. It was the custom of the painter tribe evidently. He too had a silky moustache of palest auburn; she could just see the drooping ends under the broad brim of his Panama hat. He wore a short Vandyke beard. He was tall and slim, and youthful of aspect, with long white feminine hands, an onyx cameo on one finger, a cornelian intaglio on the other. Her face grew white as the cotton-flowers in the Black Valley, the fleecy blossoms that whiten the marshy grounds, like snow in summer. The stranger—whose face she had not seen yet—had a carriage and manner that turned her blood to ice. So like the dead—so like the dead! Yet why should not two young men resemble each other in figure and bearing? There was nothing extraordinary in the resemblance; but it gave her an awful feeling, as if the returning dead had drawn near her under the bright blue sky.

She could hardly breathe. She felt that horrid sense of oppression which seizes upon the sleeper in a nightmare dream ; felt that she wanted to cry aloud, and could not for her very life. The stranger lingered a little before he came to the easel, looked about him admiringly, consideringly, as the lady had done ; mounted a lowly grave and surveyed the scene, with that indifference to the sanctity of graves which marks the tourist ; walked about a little, exploring, meditating, and then began to sing to himself softly in a tender tenor voice—a voice that had a faint touch of that veiled tone with which Sims Reeves strikes the fountain of our tears, the one exquisitely pathetic voice, which to have heard but once is to remember for ever. He sang the ‘ Donna è mobile,’ singing as he strolled from tomb to tomb, with just that debonair tone in which Mario used to troll the melody as he sauntered gaily across the bridge, leaving death and ruin behind him. At the sound of that familiar air, Flora began to tremble violently. She drew closer to the tomb, clung to it, as if there were succour and defence from some unfathomable horror even in that stony shelter.

‘If the dead could come back,’ she thought; ‘if it were possible, or if it were possible that man had deceived me! But no, Cuthbert acknowledged it. My husband confessed his part in Walter’s death. It is only a likeness in voice, and in walk and figure!’

She paused, breathless, and wiped the cold perspiration from her forehead. Greater terror she could hardly have known had the dead verily appeared to her. She thought of Lazarus, and of that unspeakable awe which must have fallen upon his sisters when they saw their dead come forth at his Master’s summons.

‘The voice—the voice!’ she thought, as those tender notes floated away on the soft air. ‘It is his very tone—his favourite melody. How often I have heard him sing, just like that, as he stooped over my shoulder to correct a line in my drawing, without knowing that he was singing!’

The stranger completed his survey, and sauntered up to the tomb, opened his colour-box, still singing to himself in an under-tone, and arranged his sheaf of brushes, his pallet, his tubes; and then, when all was ready, tossed his hat into the ferns and briers.

Then, bareheaded, he bent over the tomb for the last time, to take up his pallet before seating himself under the umbrella ; and as he did so Flora lifted her white face above the edge of the tomb and looked at him.

It was Walter Leyburne.

She gave a fearful cry, and fell face downwards in the long grass.

He had not seen the small white face looking at him over the ivy and lichen and strawberry leaves, and was so much the more startled by that agonised shriek, which seemed to come from the earth.

‘Is it mandrake?’ he thought ; ‘the soul of the murdered crying out against his assassin?’

He looked about him—saw the fallen figure in its white dress, dashed across a grave or two, and lifted the lifeless form in his arms.

‘A nice situation,’ he said to himself, ‘burdened with an unconscious stranger ! Loo ! Toinette !’

No one answered his call. He stood in helpless perplexity for a few moments, not having the faintest idea of what he ought to do for the sufferer. She hung motionless in his arms, her face turned towards his shoulder.

There was no restorative at hand but the sweet fresh mountain air—not a beck or pool within ten minutes' walk ; so, faintly remembering something that a doctor had once told him, he laid the lifeless stranger gently down on the soft long grass, with her pale face turned upward to the smiling sky. Then for the first time he saw and recognised that forgotten face.

‘Flora !’ he cried.

The heavy white lids were slowly lifted, as if life came back at his bidding ; the melancholy blue eyes looked at him dreamily for a moment, as sense returned to the bewildered brain, and then the lips faltered :

‘Am I dead too, and in the land of death ?’

The painter watched her with a guilty look as she slowly raised herself from that soft couch among the low graves, and tottered back to her favourite seat by the ivy-shrouded tomb.

‘Flora,’ he said, ‘forgive me !’

‘Forgive you !’ she echoed, looking at him dreamily ; ‘forgive you—for what ?’

‘For having suffered you to believe me dead. I



must seem a coward in your sight—a hypocrite—all that is low and mean ; but I have been the creature of circumstances. When you know all, you will acknowledge that.'

'I want to know nothing,' she answered with dignity, 'except that my husband is guiltless of your blood. I have made him suffer—have suffered myself—a world of agony for your sake.'

She looked at him wonderingly. He seemed to have lost the grace and glory that had once surrounded him like a halo. He seemed of a different clay from the lover of her girlhood. Handsome still, graceful still, with not one attribute of his youth changed or lessened—yet not the same. The glamour was gone for ever.

'What motive had you for leaving me under such a miserable delusion about you ?' she asked passionately, remembering all the anguish of the last few months. 'Why did you make a good man suffer years of wasted remorse for your sake ?'

'The good man, having knocked me down on the edge of a precipice, had some right to his share of compunction,' answered Walter Leyburne coolly.

‘If my reticence caused *you* any pain, Flora, I am deeply sorry.’

‘You were my betrothed husband,’ she answered. ‘In all the world I had only you, and my father, and Dr. Ollivant, whose friendship I had not learned to value. You were half my world in those days, and the mystery that surrounded your fate made it all the more terrible. Yes, Mr. Leyburne, you made *me* suffer more than my share of agony.’

‘Flora, forgive me! Look at me, on my knees at your feet,’ he pleaded, kneeling beside her, clasping the small cold hands. ‘I did not know what I was doing. For months I lay between life and death; and then came a time in which mind and memory were little better than a blank. When I came back to life and the waking world, and had power to communicate with you, we two had been parted nearly a year. I reasoned the matter out, and told myself that whatever natural sorrow you might have suffered for my fate was over and done with. Little good could come of your knowing the truth at that late hour. And then when I next heard of you, you were married to Dr. Ollivant.’

‘Did not honesty to him constrain you to declare the truth, putting me out of the question?’

‘I owed no allegiance to him. We fought, and he gave me a blow that just missed being mortal. I had no compunction about him. I had had my share of suffering—concussion of the brain, months of dangerous illness. I had just narrowly escaped insanity. Do you suppose that I should be particularly anxious about *his* feelings?’

‘Well, you have had your revenge,’ said Flora, with a sigh. ‘You have parted me from the best husband that ever woman had. How can I tell if he will take me back again—if he will ever forgive me all the hard things I said of him for your sake? My life has been twice darkened for your sake. Once when I grieved for your unknown fate, and now again when I was taught to believe my husband guilty of your death. No life could have been happier than mine was when that knowledge came upon me, and I flung it all away—for your sake.’

‘Easy to win all back again,’ said Walter, with a touch of that old lightness which had been a charm in the past, an attribute of that careless sunny nature

which had seemed so bright and fair to the girl's fancy. It jarred upon the woman now. 'Easy to reclaim his love; he is too devoted to you to be angry.'

Flora sighed, and was doubtful. She knew the depth of that soul whose love she had outraged. True that her husband's sin of suppression and hypocrisy was not lessened by the fact that his rival lived. Yet she saw all things in a new light now that the man she had mourned as dead stood before her, mere clay after all, and not an awful and sacred memory. The gulf between life and death is not wider than the difference between our estimation of the living and the dead. Sublimated by death the man rises to the hero, the poet soars to the god.

Not once did Flora question her sometime lover about his past. She felt very sure that the dark-eyed lady who had arranged the sketching-gear was his wife, the little butterfly creature in white and scarlet his child. He had chosen his lot in paths removed from hers, and had kept aloof from her rather than confess the bitter truth that he had never loved her; that his engagement to her was an entanglement from which he gladly withdrew himself.

All this seemed clear enough to her, and she had no desire to know more. All her thoughts and fears and hopes centred in the faithful husband from whom she had been parted for this man's sake.

She rose, with an effort, and walked a little way from the tomb, Walter by her side, offering support to those feeble steps.

'Thanks, I shall be stronger presently,' she said; 'I am going home. It is not far; a nice little shady walk, that is all. Good-afternoon, Mr. Leyburne.'

'But I cannot think of letting you go alone,' he said. 'You live near here, then?'

'Yes; I am staying with my mother-in-law at a cottage near here.'

'You are quite at home in the place, then. We—I—only arrived last night.'

'You and your wife and child,' said Flora; 'I saw them just now.'

'Yes,' he answered, with a guilty look, 'my wife and I. Flora, if you will only let me tell you everything—explain everything that has happened since that day at Branscomb—I am sure you would think better of me.'

‘What is the use of explanations?’ asked Flora. ‘No explanation will give me back my happy life, or make my husband forget my cruelty to him. Let things be as they are. I knew long ago, when I first mourned for your supposed death, that you had never cared for me.’

‘That is not true, Flora. I did care for you—who could know you without loving you?—only—’

‘Only you loved some one else better,’ interrupted Flora. ‘I heard all that.’

‘From whom, in Heaven’s name?’

‘An old—an elderly person called upon me—a Mrs. Gurner.’

‘What, she had the impertinence to intrude upon you!’ cried Walter indignantly, and with a flush of shame upon cheek and brow, for there are alliances a man scarcely cares to remember.

‘Do not be angry with her. She seemed to pity my wasted grief. She told me that you had been attached to some granddaughter of hers. Your wife, I suppose.’

‘Yes. But you must not form your opinion of my wife from that horrid old woman. My wife is

full of intelligence and brightness, and has a natural refinement that needed very little to develop it. She has been—but I could never reckon the sum of her devotion. She has given me the most unselfish love that man ever was blessed with. You will learn to forgive me when you know how much I owe her—life itself—and better than life, reason ; for nothing less than her ceaseless care could have restored either. I only gave her the life I owed to her affection.'

'I do not grudge her the prize,' returned Flora coldly. 'I only regret that you did not think it worth while to let me know that you were safe and happy, and had formed new ties, and that I might be happy for my part. It would not have been much to do.'

Walter was silent for a little, and then said humbly :

'Those who had the care of me in my day of darkness should have communicated with you. It seemed too late afterwards. Nay, I confess the truth. I was coward enough to fear your contempt for my inconstancy—your scorn of my humble marriage. It seemed easier to let things glide. I left

England on my wedding-day, and only returned late last June, since when my wife and I have been travelling in Scotland and the Lake district. We only came to Ireland a few days ago. After learning Italy by heart, we wanted to know the beauties of our native land.'

'And your fame?' said Flora; 'I wonder that has not told me you were not dead. You must be a great painter by this time.'

'Alas, no,' he answered with a smile and a sigh; 'greatness is not easily made out of such stuff as I. Yet I have worked honestly in the past two years. My wife has urged me to that, having grand ideas about my future. I sent a little *tableau de genre* to the last Parisian Exhibition, which was very well spoken of, and that is the first small leaflet I have gathered towards the crown of laurel I am to win some day. I signed my picture *Espoir*, so that even if you had seen it criticised you would have been no wiser. Nor would you be likely to hear of me from friends or acquaintance. My wife and I have wandered from place to place, unknown and unnoticed. We have lived only for ourselves, courting no society,



and following our own whims and fancies, Bohemians as we are.'

They had been walking slowly away from the abbey precincts all this time, along the shady road that led to the cottage. At the gate of the small domain they parted, with coldest courtesy on Flora's part, with solicitous regard on Walter's.

'We are to be friends in future, are we not, Flora?' he asked pleadingly, detaining the hand that touched his so coldly.

'Friends at a distance,' she answered. 'It could not give you any pleasure to meet my husband. I thank God for your preservation upon that dreadful day. I wish you and your wife all happiness that life can give you; but I would rather our lives remained far apart. The memory of the past is bitter for all of us. God bless you, Walter!' she said warmly, with a new kindness in her face, 'God bless you and yours, and good-bye!'

'That means forgiveness, doesn't it, Flora?'

'Yes. For the sake of the love that is dead, for my father's sake, who loved you so well, and as I hope to be forgiven for my sins.'

‘Now you have made me happy, Flora. Good-bye.’

He pressed the little hand, bent down to kiss it, and left her.

‘Mamma,’ said Flora, going into the shady little parlour where Mrs. Ollivant was busily engaged in a great work of accountancy, going over all the Killarney bills, and comparing them with her household ledger,—‘mamma, is it to-morrow we are going away?’

‘No, my love. Don’t you remember that we arranged for the day after? I gave you a couple of days to say good-bye to your favourite walks.’

‘*Could* we go to-morrow, mamma?’

‘Do you wish it?’

‘Very much. With all my heart.’

‘What a capricious child! Well, I think it might be done—if I were to sit up for an hour or two to-night and work at the packing.’

‘Let me help you, mamma. I should like it of all things.’

‘Do you think I would let you fatigue yourself? Why, how white you are looking, Flora!’ exclaimed

Mrs. Ollivant, lifting her eyes from those all-absorbing papers ; ‘ worse than I have seen you look for a long time. Lie down on the sofa, dear, till I bring you your afternoon cup of tea. You have been over-tiring yourself.’

‘ No, mamma, there is nothing the matter with me. But I want to get back to London. I want to see my husband, for I think, if Heaven will be kind to us, we may be happy again. If Cuthbert can but forgive me !’

‘ Forgive you, child ! He has no thought but of your happiness. Though I do not know the cause of your quarrel, I know what he has suffered. There is no measure or limit to his love.’

## CHAPTER X.

‘Du lieber Gott! was so ein Mann  
Nicht alles alles denken kann!  
Beschämt nur steh’ ich vor ihm da,  
Und sag’ zu allen Sachen ja.  
Bin doch ein arm unwissend Kind;  
Begreife nicht was er an mir find’t.’

‘Poor men’s smoky cabins are not always porticoes of moral philosophy.’

THREE years ago, a young man had lain staring at the white summer light shining through a square latticed window opposite his bed. The room in which he lay was the merest cottage chamber, with nothing to recommend it as a shelter for the humblest tenant, except spotless cleanliness. The worm-eaten old boards had been scrubbed to relentless purity, the whitewash showed no smirch or stain. No lurking cobweb clouded the corners of the ceiling. An ancient tent bedstead, with scanty dimity curtains and patchwork coverlet, nearly filled the room, leaving just enough space for an arm-chair between

bed and wall, and a rickety old triangular washstand in a corner. A row of scarlet geraniums in flower-pots on the window-ledge brightened the room within, and embellished the cottage without. It was a cabin in a little fishing village, about four miles from Branscomb in Devon—one of a straggling row of such cabins built just on the edge of the rough low beach, sheltered from land winds by the rugged crumbling red-clay cliffs that rose irregularly behind it. And these eight or nine fishermen's huts, with a little low thatched public-house, comprised the village of Liddlecomb. Here the young man lay, week after week, through the cloudless summer weather, not able even to see the bright blue water in his recumbent position, but staring at the square of summer sky, which faded and went out into darkness sometimes, and at other times struggled slowly back to light and brightness again. A little elderly man, a general practitioner of Long Sutton, came to the cabin in his gig three times a week, to see this helpless watcher of the changing light; came into the room, and sat in the arm-chair by the bed, and felt the young man's pulse, watch in hand,

while the old woman of the cottage stood by waiting his instructions. This process was repeated regularly, and with but the slightest alteration. Sometimes the old doctor shook his head despondently, sometimes he murmured that things were looking a little better.

‘It’s wearing work,’ said the fisherman’s old wife; ‘I’m paid to do my duty by him, and I do it, but it’s wearing work.’

By and by came a deeper darkness, in which even that patch of summer sky seen through the diamond-paned lattice ceased to be. At best it had been meaningless for the patient, but his eyes had seen it, and been dimly conscious of its changes. In this profounder night of unconsciousness light was not; but from this dark abyss his soul struggled upward to a new world.

One day—one never-to-be-forgotten moment in his life—he became conscious of a soft voice murmuring near him, a gentle hand laid upon his brow. That rough horny hand of the old woman’s had been a torment to him many a time, when he had no power to discern the nature of the thing that troubled

him. He lifted his tired eyelids, and looked up and saw a dark face, with softly-shining eyes looking down at him. A glass was held to his lips, and he drank a deep and long draught of some sharp cold drink; a draught that seemed to him like the wine of life. Then, without a touch of wonder, he gently murmured, 'Loo,' and closed his eyes and fell asleep.

Day after day the same tender hands ministered to him, the same loving eyes watched him. But his own state was full of change. Sometimes he recognised his nurse; sometimes all was blank; sometimes there came fits of violence, when the old fisherman and his wife had to come to the nurse's aid. Yet, through all, that faithful watcher knew no weariness. Untired, devoted, she gave all that love and fidelity can give, without stint and without measure.

This was how Walter Leyburne struggled slowly back to life, after that fall from the top of the cliff. It had not been quite so bad a fall as it seemed to the agonised spectator above. The loose rough clay had broken under his feet, and a mass of it had fallen with him, breaking his fall, so that he rather slipped down the steeply sloping face of the cliff than fell

from top to bottom. When Jarred Gurner found him, he was breathing heavily, unconscious ; there were broken bones too, but the spine was uninjured. Jarred's shifty brains at once took in the chances of profit involved in the situation. The man might die or he might recover. If he died, what a hold Jarred's knowledge of the circumstances of his death would give him upon the doctor ; provided the doctor were weak enough to shrink from the bold avowal of his act ! If Walter Leyburne recovered, on the other hand, a little clever manœuvring might win a rich husband for Loo. Jarred had aimed at that when he shut his daughter out of doors, counting upon the impulsive generosity of a hot-headed young man, too much in love to be worldly wise. Of the issue of that hazard Jarred was still ignorant, when he found Walter Leyburne at Branscomb ; but here was the young man fallen into his hands, and it would be strange if he failed this time. All these considerations flashed through his mind as he knelt beside the fallen man, and when he met Dr. Ollivant a few minutes afterwards, his scheme was decided upon, his snare was ready.



It was more difficult to provide for the bestowal of his charge; but this he did in the boldest and simplest manner. He watched for the first fishing-boat that sailed within earshot of the shore, and hailed her, vainly at first, as the crew paid no attention to his call, but after a little they seemed to think better of it, and brought their boat in to the beach. She was the smallest of craft, with only an old man and a boy on board her. On her bows was painted, in white letters, 'Snowdrop, Liddlecomb, J. Burgess,' an inscription which was useful to Mr. Gurner.

'My son has had a fall, and hurt his head a bit,' said Jarred, going close up to the boat; 'if you'll take him as far as Liddlecomb for me, I'll make it better worth your while than fishing for the next hour or two.'

The old man scratched his gray head, and protested his willingness to earn whatever the stranger might give him.

'Was it much of a fall, mister?' he asked, with friendly interest.

'No, not much; but he fell on his head, you see,

and that made it awkward. Come on shore and give me a hand with him, lad,' said Jarred to the fisher-boy, who was helping his grandfather to pull-in the boat.

Jarred and the boy were both strong, and carried Walter Leyburne easily enough between them for fifty yards or so from the bottom of the cliff to the boat. Here they laid him carefully on an old sail at the bottom of the weather-beaten bark, and then the fisherman and his lad trimmed their sail for Liddlecomb. Nothing could have been more neatly done, Jarred thought. No one had seen the transaction; this man and boy need be his only confederates, and these two simple creatures would believe any story he chose to tell them.

'He looks mortal bad,' said J. Burgess of Liddlecomb, glancing down at the white blank face lying on the brown sail-cloth. 'He looks like death.'

'Yes, his head is hurt, poor fellow; but he'll come round after a bit, I daresay. He's young and strong.'

'How did it happen, mister?'

‘Well, he was climbing up a bit of that craggy red clay to look at a bird’s nest or something—I was lying on the beach half asleep, and not paying any attention to him—and he lost his footing, I suppose, and slipped backwards. He must have fallen on his head, anyhow. He was quite insensible when I found him; and there’s an arm broken, I’m afraid.’

‘A bad job. You’re strangers in these parts, I suppose?’

‘Yes; I was never in Devonshire before. We were stopping at an inn at Long Sutton, but I hardly like the notion of taking my son so far, or to such a noisy place. Do you know of any decent house in Liddlecomb where I could get him accommodated?’

The fisherman scratched his head again meditatively, and then said, with diffidence:

‘My old woman has a room she lets, when she can. It’s clean and it’s comfortable—there’s a feather-bed that belonged to my grandmother—and perhaps that’s as much as any one could say for it.’

‘I shouldn’t wonder if it would suit very well,’

replied Jarred, who sat in the bottom of the boat by the lifeless figure lying on the sail-cloth. 'Your missus would look after this poor fellow, I suppose?'

'Well, yes, I reckon she could. She hasn't much to do except keep her place clean, and she does that with a will.'

'And Liddlecomb is a quiet place, I daresay?'

'It wouldn't be easy to make much noise there; there isn't a dozen houses altogether, and them fishermen's cottages.'

'Just the very place for a sick man. Could I get any doctor to come so far?'

'Mr. Polford does come over sometimes from Long Sutton. He's doctor for our parish.'

'We could get him to set my son's arm, then. I think, Mr. Burgess, if your room is really clean and comfortable it might suit us.'

This was how Walter Leyburne came to the fisherman's cabin at Liddlecomb. He was carried up to the small whitewashed chamber that bright June evening, while Flora was watching at Branscomb for his return. It was late in August when he

awoke from the long night of delirium and unconsciousness, and found Loo watching by his bed.

From that time he was hers, and hers only. His love for her never wavered. He turned to her in his helplessness as a child turns to its mother's breast, almost with the same pure and perfect affection. Her presence seemed to bring him healing and life. His mind, only half recovered from the shock it had experienced, remained for some time in a state of comparative weakness. Memory was but faintly awakened; the past seemed dim and remote; but one fact he was very sure of, and that was his love for Louisa Gurner. His most ardent desire—indeed, the one thought of his mind—was to make her his wife. He would have had their wedding-day earlier by three months than it was; it was Loo's insistence only that deferred it. Her father urged the folly of such obstinacy.

‘Really, Louisa, you are the most pigheaded girl I ever met with,’ Mr. Gurner exclaimed indignantly. ‘Here have you been devoting yourself to this young man for the last four months, till you’re worn to a threadpaper, and now, when he naturally wants to

make you the only return he can by marrying you, you put your back up, and talk of waiting. Waiting for what, I should like to know ?

‘ For Walter’s mind to be restored, father. He is not in his right mind yet ; life seems like a dream to him, and, because I have nursed him and been with him so long, he fancies he cannot live without me. Let us be parted for a little while, and when his mind is quite strong again, if he still wishes to marry me, I shall be proud and happy to be his wife.’

Loo had her way. She did not go back to Voysey-street, but to a quiet little school at Exeter, where among friendly, simple-minded people, she contrived to improve herself steadily and swiftly. Jarred would not lose sight of his future son-in-law. He and Walter went to Switzerland together, and dawdled away three months among mountains and valleys, and on the margin of vast blue lakes. The London Bohemian felt curiously out of place among the sublimities of nature ; the painter let his days slip by him in dreamy idleness, disinclined to begin active life again, all youthful yearnings for distinc-

tion fallen asleep, and with but one aspiration remaining to him—the desire for reunion with Loo. He counted the days of their severance, and looked forward to her letters as the one delight of his life; and Loo's letters, despite her imperfect education, were worth having; there was such freedom of expression, such life and individuality in them; and then every letter was a deification of that young gentleman dawdling through the slow autumn hours by the Genevese lake; every letter paid him divine honours, as it were, and gratified vanity and flattered self-love added sweetness to the girl's frank careless lines.

When the three months were over, Walter's improvement almost warranted Jarred in announcing his complete recovery. The two men went back to England, to the grave old city of Exeter, where Walter Leyburne and Louisa Gurner were in due course quietly married, no one who knew them being present at the ceremony, save Jarred. They left England on their wedding-day, to wander at will through all the fairest scenes of Europe—'the world forgetting, by the world forgot;' Walter perfectly

happy in the companionship of a wife who worshipped him.

Little by little the mind so nearly wrecked regained its old vigour, and Walter Leyburne awoke to the consideration of how mean a part he had played, and how weak a dupe he had been in the hands of Jarred Gurner. But no consideration that ever arose with him lessened his regard for Loo, or his belief in her truth; that never wavered; no baseness of her father's could degrade her in his eyes. He remembered how she had refused to be his wife when she stood houseless and friendless by his side, loving him as she loved him now; how she had rejected him a second time when her care and tenderness had brought him back to life; how honestly and faithfully she had stood her ground, and insisted that he should have ample time for deliberation before he took the fatal step. Jarred was pensioned liberally, and told to forget as much as possible that he had a daughter; to which stern decree Loo added a tearful postscript to the effect that she should always remember and love her father, and would come to see him whenever she came to



England. Many a tender letter did Loo write to that faulty father in the years of separation that followed her marriage.

In Venice, Walter read the announcement of Dr. Ollivant's marriage.

'How easily such wounds are healed !' he cried, with a cynical laugh. 'You thought she would break her heart about me, Loo.'

'I should have broken my heart if I had lost you,' replied that devotee, with an adoring look.

'And yet you seemed willing to lose me, Loo, for you refused me twice.'

'I did not want you to pick me up out of the gutter, for mere pity's sake,' she answered, 'only because I loved you so much.'

'If all men could pick such pearls out of poverty's gutter, life would be happier than it is, Loo,' said her husband proudly.

## CHAPTER XI.

'Now at the last gasp of Love's latest breath,  
When, his pulse failing, Passion speechless lies,  
When Faith is kneeling by his bed of death,  
And Innocence is closing up his eyes,  
Now, if thou wouldst, when all have given him over,  
From death to life thou mightst him yet recover.'

NEVER did a given number of miles seem longer to the impatient traveller than the distance between Killarney and London seemed to Flora, as she journeyed homewards, eager, beyond all measure of eagerness, to make atonement to that sinner for whom she had been so implacable a judge three little months ago.

Dr. Ollivant's sin, his tacit falsehood, his long-sustained hypocrisy, was in no wise lessened by the fact of his rival's escape from the jaws of death. The doctor's part in this business remained exactly what it had been before. Yet Flora hastened back to England to forgive him—nay more, to entreat his

forgiveness for her unkindness. But then women are rarely logical; the exacter sciences, in all their rigid angularity, have no place in the soft curves of a woman's nature. Walter Leyburne dead had been a central figure in the fair picture of the past, a memory fraught with grief, a bright and faultless shade; but Walter Leyburne living, and, by his own showing, guilty either of supreme moral cowardice or utter indifference to her feelings, was quite another person. She compared his conduct with her husband's, weighed the fickleness of one against the changeless constancy of the other, and naturally gave the preference to the man who had sinned for her sake, rather than to the man who had sinned against her. There was as deep a falsehood in Walter's offer of his love to her that summer day at Branscomb, while his heart was in reality given to his low-born enchantress, as ever there had been in Cuthbert Ollivant's concealment of his part in his rival's supposed death. And of the two falsehoods, it was easier to Flora to forgive the falsehood of the faithful lover.

Nor was this all. It is more than possible that,

in the secret chamber of her heart, she had forgiven her husband even before Walter's resurrection. Pity, and yearning, and tenderness, and remorse for hard words spoken, had been struggling in that womanly breast with a truthful woman's scorn of untruth. Smouldering love needed but the lightest spark to kindle into a flame ; and, lo, kindly Providence had given her an excuse for pardon. She would go back to him and say, ' Be happy again, repentant sinner ; the accident in which foolish passion involved you was not fatal. Your rival lives ; no more a rival, and never in his brightest hour worthy to be measured against so true a lover.'

All through the autumn night—in the sea-passage between Waterford and Milford Haven—Flora lay awake, listening to the monotonous chorus of the waves, and thinking of the meeting to which she was journeying. She pictured the scene to herself, conjuring up the lonely figure that had haunted her among the ash-groves of Inisfallen, amidst the silence of the Black Valley. She thought of her husband sitting alone in that grave library to which she had gone so often in quest of some favourite author,

stealing gently in upon his studious reverie, and seeing him look up startled, but always pleased at her coming, always willing to close his book, and come to her assistance, to advise, to enlighten, to amuse her. Sweet, stolen half-hours of companionship in the midst of the busy professional day, should she ever know their pleasantness again? It was only in looking back at them that she had discovered how precious they were.

She pictured him as he would be at midday tomorrow, when she had come to the end of her journey, and stole in upon him unannounced, just as in the days of her happy wifehood. She fancied him sitting at his desk, surrounded by his usual litter of books and papers, reading one of the medical journals in some pause of his day's labour, and how, at the sound of her footstep, he would look up with his calm professional expression, just gently sympathetic, as who should say, 'What new traveller on the ash-strewed way to death has made my house his halting-place?' And she had fancied how, seeing it was no common patient, but his repentant wife, who had entered his room, he would start up from his

chair, doubtful perhaps for a moment how he should receive her, and then, instantly subjugated by love's old witchery, open wide his arms and fold her to his heart. O, sweet, sweet, sweet hour! never again would she run the hazard of eternal banishment from that fond shelter.

But what if imagination's picture were unrealised? What if he, so strong to love, should prove himself as powerful in his resentment? What if he should greet her with aversion's stony look, point a stern finger to the door, and say, 'Henceforward our homes are apart—I have no longer a wife'?

These two pictures—one, perhaps, just as likely to be a forecast of the truth as the other—haunted the sleepless traveller all through that night of fever and unrest. Such a prolonged agony of hope and doubt and fear was concentrated in those few hours, that brief as the night was on board the swift steamer it seemed almost endless to this anxious traveller.

She was surprised on landing at Milford to discover that night was still 'at odds with morning which was which.' Faint gleams of dawning light,

pale and sickly, struggled with the yellower glare of the lamps in the great empty station.

‘I hope you slept well, my love,’ said Mrs. Ollivant, who had caught the green hue of the waves in her transit, and was crushed and faded of aspect as if by the passage of years, instead of six or eight hours at sea. ‘I know what a good sailor you are, and that you can sleep on board a steamer;’ this with a plaintive sigh.

‘No, mamma, I couldn’t sleep much ; I had so many things to think about. But I hope you were not ill,’ added Flora sympathetically, sea-sickness being inscribed in unmistakable characters upon the elder lady’s brow.

‘My dear, I was in the hands of Providence,’ replied Mrs. Ollivant gravely, ‘and the stewardess was very attentive. But there was one period of the night when I felt that if we had gone to the bottom it would not have signified much to me.’

Through those chill gleams of new-born day, unattractive of aspect, like most newly-created things, the travellers sped onward, across the hilly Welsh country, at first open and pastoral—a sheep country

evidently—and anon to districts famous for coal and iron, where the earth was overhung with a smoky pall, and a general blackness and grimness pervaded everything; past English cathedral cities and obscure manufacturing towns; leaving the hills behind, and with them the romance and charm of the landscape; into the verdant rural home counties with their somewhat tea-board prettiness; by the rushy river that winds below the gentle slopes of Caversham, across the bridge that spans the same bright river by pleasant Maidenhead—favourite resort of the tired Londoner—and so onward till the clear autumn air thickens over the multitudinous roofs of the mighty city.

They were at Paddington—Mrs. Ollivant looking a monument of Neptune's inhumanity; Flora pale as death, but with a bright resolute look in eye and lip.

'Mamma,' she said, in a quick decided way, a few minutes before they reached the terminus, 'you take a cab and the luggage, and drive across to Waterloo, and go on to Teddington by the first train that will take you there. I know how anxious you are about the house.'

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‘But you’ll come with me, won’t you, Flora?’

‘No, mamma. I shall drive straight to Wimpole-street, to Cuthbert. If all goes well, I shall persuade him to come to the Willows with me in time for dinner. If we do not come by that time, you may know that he has refused to forgive me. But in that case I shall come home alone, most likely.’

‘My dear child, how can you doubt his forgiveness? He has never blamed you in my hearing. He has always taken all blame upon himself.’

‘It is his nature to be generous,’ answered Flora gravely. ‘I do not say that he has been altogether blameless, but I have been too hard in judging the one error of his life. I have forgotten how much I owe him, what manifold reasons I have for gratitude, and indulgence, and love.’

‘Go to him, dear, and be assured of his forgiveness. I shall look forward anxiously for your arrival at the Willows. Dinner at seven, I suppose, as usual? And I will take care to have everything nice,’ added Mrs. Ollivant, full of maternal solicitude, and not a little agitated by the prospect of reconciliation between those two whom she loved so

well ; yet anxious withal upon the question of fish and the possibilities of partridges. These sordid material things have their influence upon the spiritual half of existence, mind and matter being curiously interwoven in our lower nature. A good dinner is not without its function in domestic life, and an offended husband is more prone to the melting mood after soles *au maître d'hôtel* and a well-roasted partridge than after the frugal housewife's leg of mutton and caper-sauce.

So the two ladies took separate cabs at Paddington terminus ; Mrs. Ollivant driving to Waterloo, under a perilous mountain of portmanteaus, Flora to Wimpole-street.

How slowly the rumbling old four-wheel cab drove ! It was such a little way, yet the first half of the journey seemed long. But when she saw the familiar Marylebone-road and the well-known street-corners, Flora's heart grew heavy with an awful fear, and she would gladly have lengthened the distance between her and the home she had so longed to reach. The cab turned into Wimpole-street with many a jolt and groan. There were the two rows

of monotonous houses staring each other out of countenance, the whitened doorsteps, the shining brass-plates on professional doors, the balcony boxes, with their scarlet geranium and fading mignonette, the plate-glass windows and invariable draperies—crimson damask below, white muslin above—here a birdcage, there a man- or maid-servant looking out, like Sisera's mother at her lattice—and then Flora's heart gave a great thump, as the cab, after plunging uncertainly at the kerbstone once or twice, came to a standstill opposite Dr. Ollivant's door.

His house looked the dingiest in the street.. The doorsteps had been neglected—those broad expanses of stone which had once been of spotless whiteness, which had been hearthstoned twice a day, if need were, under Mrs. Ollivant's firm rule. There were straws and shreds of London rubbish in the corners; the brass-plate was dull; the geraniums in the dining-room window-boxes were languishing for lack of water; the half-drawn blinds hung awry. Desolation was imprinted upon the house-front—for the fronts of houses have their unmistakable language.

Flora's heart sank at the aspect of her old home.

The change was her fault. She had robbed her husband of the faithful housewife who had made his home bright and pleasant for him; for her selfish pleasure Mrs. Ollivant had deserted the post of duty, and left her son homeless. A neglected house is no home.

The factotum opened the door as usual; but even he had an air of having run to seed. He wore his morning-jacket of striped linen, instead of the respectable black which it had been his wont to assume ere this hour of the day, and the jacket looked limp and dirty. The man himself had a haggard look, as of one who had kept late hours.

Flora said not a word, but crossed the hall to the consulting-room, opened the door, and went in; heedless of whether she might interrupt some professional interview by that unauthorised entrance.

The room was empty. The papers on the doctor's desk were blown about as the autumn wind rushed in from the hall. There stood his vacant chair, dusty as with the dust of many days; that solemn-looking, morocco-covered, high-backed arm-chair, in which the physician had been wont to sit

as in the place of judgment, and issue sentence of life or death. A pile of unopened letters lay on the desk: a spider had spun a gossamer bridge from stopper to stopper of the tarnished silver inkstand.

‘O ma’am,’ gasped the butler, ‘I am thankful to Providence that you’ve come home! If I’d known where to write I should have written to you, or your mamma-in-law, within the last three or four days, though my master ordered me not.’

‘Write to me—about what?’ cried Flora, sorely agitated.

Something evil had arisen—what she knew not. The aspect of the house presaged calamity.

‘Is Dr. Ollivant away?’ she asked breathlessly.

The room looked as if it had been deserted for weeks.

‘Away? O no, ma’am; he’s too ill for that.’

‘Ill—is he ill?’

‘Didn’t he tell you, ma’am, in his letters? He told me he had said all that was necessary about himself, and that I was not to trouble about writing to you, even if he got ever so bad; but just to bring in a hospital nurse, and leave him in Mr. Darley’s

hands—Mr. Darley of Bedford-square, you know, ma'am—and let him pull through.'

'What is the matter? Pray, pray tell me everything! Is he very ill?' asked Flora piteously.

O tenderness, forgiveness, remorse, that came too late!

'God have pity on me,' she prayed inwardly, 'and save me from the anguish of unavailing regret!'

'Well, ma'am, I hope not very ill; but Mr. Darley owned last night that he didn't like the turn master had taken, and he sent me for Dr. Bayne, round in the square, and the two gentlemen was together talking for nearly half an hour, and they changed the medicine—which is a thing I never like, for my own part, doctors chopping and changing with medicine, as if they didn't know their own minds—and Mr. Darley told me to get in an extra nurse for night; and there I was in a cab half over London till after midnight; but I got a young person at last at the institution at Highbury, and a very nice young person she is.'

'Has he been ill long?' Flora asked, taking off her hat and jacket hastily with trembling hands.

‘Over three weeks, ma’am, off and on. It began with a chill, shivery-like, and then a kind of low fever hanging about him—no appetite, no rest. I could tell when I cleaned the lamp of a morning how many hours he’d sat in this room over-night. But he saw his patients, and went his daily round just as usual for a week; then all at once he knocked under, and took to his bed. “It’s no use,” he said; “tell people who call that I’m out of town. I’ll ask Mr. Darley to see my regular patients.” And I went to fetch Mr. Darley, and he has attended master ever since.’

‘I’ll go to him at once,’ said Flora, moving towards the stairs.

The man followed her nervously.

‘I’m afraid you’ll find him very bad, ma’am,’ he said. ‘You must be prepared to see a great change in him.’

‘I am prepared for anything,’ she answered with a sob, ‘except to lose him.’

And then she ran up-stairs, swift and light of footstep, making no sound upon the thickly-carpeted stone.

She opened the door of the front room on the second-floor—the room that had been newly furnished for the doctor's bride—expecting to find the invalid there. But to her surprise she saw the furniture swathed in brown holland, the room empty. All things had been kept with religious care ; the dressing-room, with its turquoise-and-gold upholstery, was shrouded from dust and light ; carpet, curtains, mirrors, all covered. The rooms she had sanctified by her presence were to be profaned by no footfall in her absence. So near fanaticism is true love !

The back room on this floor was Mrs. Ollivant's, and the door was locked. Flora mounted the next flight swiftly, breathlessly, and opened the door of that room where she had awakened one winter afternoon from the long night of delirium. Yes, he was there ; on the bed where she had lain through so many fever-haunted nights reposed the wasted form of her deserted husband. She could see the sharp angles of his figure beneath the tumbled bedclothes. The nurse was sitting at a table by the window taking notes of her case. A clock ticked upon the mantelpiece, a pinched little fire burned in the grate, the



room was littered with medicine bottles, all the apparatus of sickness ready—weapons whereby Life does battle with his grim adversary, Death.

He was awake; the large hollow eyes were turned towards the door by which Flora entered, but with how vacant a gaze! He looked at her, and did not know her.

She went over to the bed, knelt down beside it, took his burning hand in hers, whispered to him softly, kissed his parched lips. Without avail. There was no one in this wide world more strange to him than she.

‘Another nurse!’ he said wearily. ‘What is the use of all this fuss?’

‘Not a hired nurse, Cuthbert; your wife—your sorrowful, loving wife—come back to nurse you. Look at me, dear. Your own true wife has returned, never to leave you again.’

He turned his haggard eyes to her face, and stared at her fixedly, without one ray of recognition.

‘What is the good of all these people?’ he exclaimed. ‘I had better be in a hospital at once, if my room is to be full of hospital nurses. Go away,

please,' to Flora, 'and leave me in peace, if you can. You are always tormenting me about something.'

The nurse, who had started up, surprised at Flora's entrance, now came forward, and took possession of the intruder, with a professional air of authority.

'O, if you please, ma'am, you mustn't talk to him. The doctors say he must be kept very quiet.'

'But I am his wife—'

'Yes, ma'am, and your coming in so suddenly might have given him a shock if he had known you. Perhaps it was lucky he didn't recognise you.'

'Lucky!' repeated Flora with a blank look. 'Will he ever know me again, I wonder?'

'O dear, yes; don't be afraid, ma'am,' answered the nurse cheerfully; it was so easy for a hired nurse, who came and went like the wind, to be cheerful; 'he'll come round again, and remember you, I dare say, before long. I have seen worse cases of typhoid than him.'

'But he is dangerously ill, is he not?' asked Flora hopelessly.

'The doctors are anxious about him, ma'am; but

with care— It is not a hopeless case. You mustn't think that, ma'am. Pray don't !'

'What have you been writing there ?'

'Only my journal of the case, ma'am. The doctors wish me to keep an account of everything the patient takes—a spoonful of jelly or an ounce of beef-tea. I give him everything in that two-ounce glass. It's most important that he should take nourishment and be kept quiet.'

'Does his mind wander much ?'

'No, ma'am, not very bad ; but he sometimes says odd things. He has talked of you a great deal in the last few days, and has sometimes fancied you were in the room.'

'And now I have come he does not know me. That seems hard.'

'He may know you by and by, ma'am,' said the nurse consolingly. 'He changes very quickly.'

'If you could let me do something for him ; if I could be of use, in any way,' pleaded Flora.

'Indeed, ma'am, there is very little to be done. You might help me, perhaps, when I have to give him medicine, or wine, or beef-tea. He dislikes tak-

ing anything, and it is sometimes quite difficult to get him to take it.'

'I will gladly help you in any way,' said Flora eagerly. 'I shall feel less miserable if I can be of ever so little use. May I stay in the room, please?—I will be very quiet.'

All this was spoken in so subdued a tone that the sound of the two voices could hardly reach the bed where the patient lay, moving head or arms restlessly, every now and then, in utter weariness.

'The doctor said he was to be kept so very quiet, ma'am; there was to be nobody but the nurse in his room; but if you will not talk or move about much, I should think you might stay.'

It seemed a hard thing to deny a wife the right to sit in her dying husband's chamber, for the nurse had but the faintest hope of a happy issue out of Dr. Ollivant's peril. It was not the virulence of the disease that was to be feared so much as the weakness of the patient. He had not cared to live, and he had let life slip away from him. He had wasted the wealth of a vigorous constitution upon long nights of sleeplessness; weariest vigils, full of sad thoughts

and bitter vain regrets. He had wilfully squandered the forces of his manhood, reckless of his loss. Life without Flora meant misery. He had been too much of a man to end the difficulty with a dose of prussic acid or a pistol bullet ; but he had not been enough of a Christian to trust in God for the coming of the brighter day ; and he had been glad when he felt his strength ebbing away from him, and saw his years dwindling to the briefest span. Of what avail was that empty arid future which lies between ruined hopes and the grave ? His wife had renounced him. His child had been taken from him. No other child would ever be born to him, to be the staff and comfort of his age. He had earned more than enough to secure the independence of his mother's declining years. There was no reason why he should desire life, either on his own account or for the sake of others. So when he found his strength leaving him, and the insidious low fever—a poison, inhaled perchance in hospital ward or fetid alley, acting upon a debilitated constitution—that fever whose danger he knew so well, fastening its deadly grip upon him, he had no sentiment but gladness.

‘She will feel just a shade of sorrow, perhaps,’ he said to himself, ‘when somebody tells her that I am dead; just one brief pang of regret for him who loved as Othello loved—not wisely. And then some new bright life will open before her; and a few years hence, when she has formed new ties, and is the centre of some happy home, she will look back at her past, and all the days that she spent with me will seem only a brief unfinished chapter in the full volume of her life. To me it has been the whole book; to her it may appear only an episode.’

Thus Cuthbert Ollivant had laid himself down very calmly when the hour came in which he could no longer perform his daily task-work. It was not until he felt a cloud stealing over mind and senses, and his wits wandering as he tried to concentrate his attention upon a patient’s answers to his almost mechanical questioning, that the doctor felt it was time for him to succumb. Physical weakness or weariness would have hardly driven him away from his consulting-room—he clung to his work as the one thing left to him in life—but when he felt his mind troubled, and found his hand falter uncertainly in

the writing of a simple prescription, he was fain to confess that his working days were over.

‘Opus operatum est,’ he said to himself. ‘My career is finished, and it stops short of fame.’

He went up-stairs to his room on the third floor, one bright September afternoon, and laid himself down upon his bed, with a quiet conviction that this was for him the end of all earthly business. He would fain have let life gently glide away without wearisome endeavour to revive the expiring flame, and it was only to satisfy his faithful old servant that he allowed Mr. Darley to be called in.

This gentleman, a family practitioner of standing, had done his best, but the malady had not yielded to his skill. The patient’s weakness had increased day after day, and Mr. Darley had confessed unwillingly that the time of peril had come. Unless a change for the better occurred before many hours were over, the end was inevitable.

It was at this crisis that Flora arrived in Wimpole-street.

All that day she sat by her husband’s bed, in the shadow of the curtains, and heard his restless move-

ments, his broken murmured words—disjointed sentences, in which her own name sometimes occurred, but which were at other times purely scientific, with here and there a few words of Latin. She made no farther effort to win his recognition. The nurse had told her silence and quiet were of vital consequence, and she obeyed to the letter. With her heart yearning towards that unconscious sufferer, she sat quietly in her shadowy corner, breathing voiceless prayers for his recovery. It was only after seven o'clock that she thought of poor Mrs. Ollivant, at this moment placidly expecting her son and daughter at the Willows. 'Poor mamma,' she said to herself, 'I ought to telegraph to her. How cruel of me not to have sent for her sooner; how cruel to keep her away from her son's sick-bed!' She stole noiselessly from the room, ran down-stairs to the old servant, and despatched him to the telegraph-office with a message:

'Dear mamma, Cuthbert is very ill. Come at once.'

At eight o'clock came Mr. Darley, and Dr. Bayne from Cavendish-square. How Flora's heart sank as the two grave elderly men came into the room, and



bent over the sick-bed, and ordered a candle to be brought, and examined their patient, with a professional unceremoniousness that seemed like sacrilege! They listened to his breathing, and tapped his chest and back, and experimented with him in various ways, and anon looked at each other gravely, and whispered a little together with dismal meaning, as it seemed to Flora. She sat motionless, saying not a word, and neither of the doctors had any idea of her presence, till the nurse informed them in a whisper that young Mrs. Ollivant had come home, and wished to be allowed to help in nursing her husband.

Then the two gentlemen turned to her with a friendly sympathetic air, and murmured a few kindly words, but words that had no hopefulness in them.

Flora heard them in silence, and then followed them out of the room.

‘Gentlemen,’ she cried piteously, when they were on the landing outside, ‘tell me the truth! Will my husband die?’

‘My dear Mrs. Ollivant,’ said Dr. Bayne, who had been a frequent visitor in Wimpole-street during her happy wedded life, ‘while the faintest spark of

life still remains there is always a ray of hope ; but I fear—I sadly fear my poor friend is dying.'

She looked at him tearlessly for a few moments, and then said gently,

' I thank you for telling me the truth. It is best.'

She went back to her husband's room—in the abandonment of her grief forgot all that she had been told about the need of quietness—and flung herself on her knees by his side.

' My love, my love,' she sobbed, ' my lost love ! Is there no forgiveness in heaven for my sin against you ?'

Her voice; those keen accents of anguish, pierced the dimness of delirium. Cuthbert Ollivant opened his eyes and looked at her, this time with recognition in his gaze.

' Flora !' he murmured faintly.

There was neither surprise nor joy in his tone. In his utter weakness of mind and body he had passed beyond the region of strong emotions.

' My love, it is I—your wife—your sorrowful, repentant wife !'

‘No,’ he said, with ever so faint a touch of wonder; ‘that cannot be; my wife hates me.’

She remembered her words in the garden that fatal summer evening—words of unmitigated hatred and contempt; words keener than a sword thrust, and harder to forget.

‘My dearest, I was unjust, cruel, ungrateful,’ sobbed Flora. ‘It has pleased God to open my eyes to my wickedness. I have something to tell you about Walter by and by; something that will set your mind at rest. O live, dearest; live, for my sake; and all my life to come shall be one long atonement.’

He contemplated her mutely for a few moments, with a strangely pathetic look, and then answered quietly:

‘Too late, my dear. The pitcher is broken at the fountain.’

## CHAPTER XII.

'There is a deep nick in Time's restless wheel  
For each man's good ; when which nick comes, it strikes :  
As rhetoric yet works not persuasion,  
But only is a mean to make it work ;  
So no man riseth by his real merit,  
But when it cries clink in his Kaiser's spirit.'  
'Fate hath no voice but the heart's impulses.'

HAVING once, in a fortunate hour, made a halt upon the road to ruin, Jarred Gurner seemed fairly disposed to stop short altogether upon that broad highway, and to turn his steps towards that narrower and more thorny path which honest industry travels, not altogether without cheering sunshine or mild refreshing shower.

The sight of his daughter, refined and beautified by her three years of prosperous married life, the thought of his bonny lass Loo made a lady, and yet not too proud to own and love him, had not been without a wholesome effect.

'Hang it all !' he exclaimed, after that unexpected visit of Mrs. Leyburne's in Voysey-street, 'come

what may, I won't disgrace Loo; no abusive snob shall ever put her out of countenance by calling her father a welsher. I'll try and make both ends meet with the three hundred a year Leyburne allows me, and I'll live like an artist and a gentleman. And the first step in that direction,' added Jarred, with a touch of rancour, 'shall be to shut up that blessed rag-shop down-stairs.'

The second-hand wardrobe had been ever a bone of contention between Mrs. Gurner and her son. It was a trade against which Jarred's soul revolted. He hated the look of the tawdry finery hanging in the window; he was suspicious of the women who came, generally sheltered by the shades of evening, to buy or sell. The traffic might add a few shillings to the weekly stock, but its tawdry disreputability was poorly atoned for by the shillings that dribbled through Mrs Gurner's hands, and served to pay the milkman, or propitiate the chandler with a trifle on account.

Jarred went down-stairs at once, and into the shop, where he made a contemptuous survey of his mother's stock-in-trade, set forth and displayed in a manner which Mrs. Gurner considered 'taking:' a

limp blue-gauze ball-dress, crowned with a crumpled wreath of artificial camellias; a pair of soiled white-satin shoes, daintily placed side by side with a dilapidated fan; a rusty black moire-antique gracefully draped with a ragged yak-lace shawl; a ruby-velvet bonnet, perched on the top of an imitation-sable muff, suggestive of comfortable attire for the coming winter.

‘I suppose, taking them in the heap, they might realise a five-pound note,’ mused Jarred.

Mrs. Gurner emerged from her retirement on the other side of a screen of drapery, and confronted her son with an injured air. She had been reading the seventeenth number of *Mable Mandeville, or the Duchess's Death-Warrant*, in a comfortable corner, sheltered from autumn's sharpening breezes by a tumbled velvet paletot and a silk dress or two hanging on a clothes-horse.

‘You’ve no call to depreciate the stock, Jarred,’ she said. ‘You had the full benefit of that one pound seventeen-and-sixpence I got for the voylet satin, and if it hadn’t been for that money we should have been left without a drop of water for the tea-kettle. The

collector called that very afternoon, quite out of patience.'

'That's all very well, mother, but how many one pound seventeen-and-sixpences have we ever got out of this blessed hole? Half-a-crown or three-and-six-pence has been about your biggest line, in a general way.'

'It has been a help, Jarred.'

'Perhaps it has, but I mean to try if we can't do without such helps in future. I've always detested the business, you know, and the class of people it brings about us, whether they're lady's-maids out of place, or something worse; and now that Loo has come home, as good a lady as any in the land, I've made up my mind to shut up shop. So you may just put your rags together, and call in some one to value them, and then sell 'em offhand.'

'There's the good-will of the business, Jarred, if you think of moving,' suggested Mrs. Gurner dolefully.

'The good-will of a business that brings in something under fifteen shillings a week at its best!' ejaculated Jarred contemptuously. 'Besides, I don't think of moving; I mean to furnish this room de-

cently as a parlour, instead of pigging in that hole at the back ; and in short, mother, though I daresay you won't believe me, I mean to turn over a new leaf, and live like an artist and an honest man.'

'I'm sure I'm very glad to hear you *say* as much, Jarred,' replied Mrs. Gurner, with an emphasis on the word '*say*.' 'Three hundred a year ought to be enough for us to live upon comfortably, and keep up a genteel appearance.'

'I don't know about the genteel appearance,' said Mr. Gurner doubtfully. 'If it means living in a terrace of tabbies and government clerks, and going to church on Sunday mornings, it's out of my line. Voysey-street does well enough for me.'

Mrs. Gurner heaved a plaintive sigh.

'It isn't Voysey-street I'm afraid of, Jarred,' she said, 'but the public in the neighbourhood. You'll never be free from temptation while you live within five minutes' walk of the King's Head.'

Jarred laughed this remonstrance to scorn.

'Do you suppose that a tavern-parlour is an institution peculiar to the neighbourhood of Voysey-street, mother?' he asked. 'There are public in



your virtuous suburbs—yes, and sporting public, too—in spite of the tabbies. But I do honestly mean to cut the turf. It has never brought me luck. I haven't the right sort of brains for book-making. It wants your stolid plodding dullard to make a Napoleon of the turf. I never was good at figures. Art and arithmetic won't run in double harness.'

Comforted by this view of things, Mr. Gurner felt equal to turning his back upon the sporting public and the ring. It was a consoling sensation to feel himself too good for that kind of life, and to ascribe his failure to a superior genius. Nor had his friends of the turf behaved particularly well to him of late. Even Mr. Jobury, that mildest of butchers, had forgotten himself so far as to use insulting reference with regard to the nonpayment of that crown-piece borrowed on Hampton racecourse; a paltry sum, which no gentleman would have degraded himself by remembering. His coffers being replenished by a handsome gift from Louisa, Jarred devised the most cutting manner of repaying the trifling loan, loftily ignoring divers previous amounts, which would have swollen the crown to a five-pound

note. He called at Mr. Jobury's one day at the family dinner-hour, and delivered the five shillings with sundry halfpence, neatly wrapped in paper and delicately sealed, to the small domestic who opened the door, requesting the maiden, in a voice intended to be audible in Mr. Jobury's parlour, to inform her master that he refunded herewith the loan Mr. Jobury had been so uneasy about, principal and interest to date, and that he would be obliged for a receipt in full at Mr. Jobury's convenience.

This message, delivered in Jarred's haughtiest tone, meant eternal divorcement between Jobury and Gurner. Three days afterwards Mr. Gurner received an unmistakably feminine epistle, in a scratchy calligraphy, beginning with Mr. Jobury's compliments, and finishing in the first person with small *i*'s, requesting the repayment of those other moneys which Mr. Gurner stood indebted to his quondam friend. But of this somewhat vituperative composition Jarred discreetly avoided all acknowledgment.

Having thus dissevered himself from his bosom friend, Jarred felt that he was on his way to the Temple of Virtue. The sight of his daughter had

moved him deeply. Her grace, her refinement, awakened in him a new disgust for his own sordid life; her affection, unchanged and unchanging, touched some gentler chord in his nature. He remembered remorsefully how little he had ever done to culture so bright a flower; how this poor child had grown up like Cinderella, amidst dirt and ashes, without even a fairy godmother; and how small a right he had to the love she yielded him so freely.

‘I suppose you had to come to me on the sly, my girl,’ he said to his daughter that night in Voysey-street.

‘No, father, I never have any secrets from Walter,’ she answered gently. ‘We only reached London at four o’clock this afternoon. We are staying at the Charing Cross for a few days before we start for our autumn tour, and directly after dinner I sent for a cab and came here to you. Grandmother was so pleased to see me. It seemed like old times; except that there was no nagging,’ added Loo, with a smile.

‘But your husband didn’t like your coming here, I’ll warrant,’ said Jarred moodily.

‘Well, no, father, honestly he would keep us apart if he could. He hasn’t quite forgiven you for keeping him in hiding all the time he was ill. He thinks that through your conduct on that occasion he has been made to play a paltry part towards that poor young lady, Miss Chamney.’

‘Why, what a blessed fool you are, Loo!’ exclaimed her father, with mingled aggravation and contempt. ‘Don’t you know that he would have married that poor young lady but for my *coup d’état*? If I had not contrived to make Dr. Ollivant believe he was dead and done for, young Leyburne would have been taken home to Mr. Chamney’s house, and nursed and petted and cried over by the young lady; and then when he got well of course he’d have married her, as in duty bound, and been miserable ever afterwards, since any one with an eye in their head could have told that you were the only woman he ever cared for. There never was such a pigheaded, ungrateful girl as you, Loo, for looking at things in the wrong light. If it hadn’t been for my seizing upon the chance that Providence flung in my way, you’d never have been Walter Leyburne’s wife!’

‘I know that, father, and the knowledge of it has given me many a miserable hour. I owe all my happiness to a trick. I feel as if we had set a snare for Walter, and that I was the meanest of women in marrying him.’<sup>1</sup>

‘You couldn’t have married him if he hadn’t asked you, and he wouldn’t have married you if he hadn’t loved you better than any one else,’ retorted Jarred, with ever-increasing contempt. ‘But I think you might be grateful to the man who saved your lover from his entanglement with another woman, and brought you and him together, by one happy stroke of business. If I’d been a sleepy kind of a customer, and let the golden opportunity slip by me, you wouldn’t be Mrs. Walter Leyburne.’

Touched by this reproof, Loo put her arms round her father’s neck, and kissed him as tenderly as at their first greeting.

‘Dear father, I am not ungrateful,’ she said; ‘I know that all you did was done for my sake. Only—’

‘Only, you’re ashamed to remember that you owe all your good fortune to your poor old father’s help. Never mind, Loo, it is but the way of the world.

When a man has mounted a ladder, the first thing he does is to kick it down. I'm not offended, and I'm not surprised.'

Jarred stood upon his dignity for a few minutes after this, and Loo had some slight difficulty in bringing him round again to his pleasanter humour. But he could not long resist the blandishments of the daughter who had been made a lady. She had an air and a grace that were so new to him. Her voice, always rich and full, had now a subdued sweetness that moved him like music. The wandering life she had led with her artist husband, the communion with all that is loveliest and grandest in nature, the study of all that is purest and noblest in art, had been a higher educational process than any formal scholastic routine ever devised by mortal teacher, and Loo had profited by her opportunities of culture. Jarred's rugged nature succumbed to a new influence. At parting that night, Loo slipped her purse into her father's hand.

'It's only a little of my pocket-money, father,' she said, 'but I daresay it may be useful.'

'My dear, it will,' replied Jarred frankly.

‘And by and by, if I can persuade Walter to stop in England, and settle down to his work, and make a name for himself, as I am sure he could, I shall be able to come to see you very often, father,’ Loo said tenderly. ‘You would like me to come, wouldn’t you?’

‘Like you to come! Why, what else in the world have I to be fond of or proud of, Loo? And you know I always was proud of you, my lass; not that I ever thought you’d grow up such a beauty.’

‘And perhaps Walter might be of some use to you professionally,’ continued Loo, blushing at the paternal praise. ‘He could recommend you to people who want pictures restored, or violins doc—renovated,’ said Loo, tripping a little over the dubious word.

‘Perhaps he might, my dear, if he cared to take so much trouble,’ replied Jarred, rather stiffly.

And thus father and daughter had parted, a day or two before Mr. and Mrs. Leyburne left London for that pleasant leisurely tour which brought them ultimately to the Irish lakes.

It was the remembrance of this interview with his

daughter which inspired Jarred with the yearning for a life somewhat more decent in tone than the loose fragmentary existence he had been leading for the last year or two. He did not sigh for actual respectability — days and nights regulated by the clock; meals at stated hours; a ten-roomed house in the suburbs; a bed of geraniums in a garden fourteen feet by twelve; and a parlour-maid with a white apron. These things had no attraction for him. But it had somehow entered into his mind that there was a better life within his capacity than that downhill career which he had been travelling with such companions as Joseph Jobury and that gentleman's particular circle. Nay, evoked from some hidden depths in his nature, there had shone forth of late stray gleams of manhood and independence. That five-pound note earned from Mr. Ahasuerus, the violin dealer, by his own patient labour had been sweeter to him than Dr. Ollivant's hush-money, or even largesse from Walter Leyburne, on whose purse a father-in-law had some claim.

Jarred called in the nearest auctioneer without delay, and asked his advice as to the disposal of the



second-hand wardrobe. Mr. Plyson, the auctioneer, who was experienced in the sale and barter of petty stocks-in-trade, looked about him dubiously for a minute or so before replying.

‘How long have you had the business?’ he asked Mr. Gurner.

‘It’s my mother’s business, not mine,’ answered Jarred contemptuously. ‘She’s been trading in these blessed rags for the last nineteen or twenty years, I believe.’

‘Then why not sell the stock and good-will together?’ asked the auctioneer.

‘That’s what I say,’ ejaculated Mrs. Gurner dolefully.

‘Put an advertisement in *Lloyd’s Weekly* — A genteel old-established business, admirably adapted to a widow or two sisters. Only a small capital required. Nothing degrading to the feelings.’

‘That’s how I’ve always looked at it,’ moaned Mrs. Gurner.

‘The stock by itself would hardly realise ten pounds, I should think,’ said the professional valuer; ‘but the stock and good-will ought to bring fifty.’

‘If you put it in that light, I’m agreeable,’ answered Jarred. ‘I don’t know that I wouldn’t as leave live anywhere else, provided I can get a north light.’

The matter was decided on the spot. The auctioneer was to find a purchaser for the business, and a tenant for the house, in one and the same person, and Mrs. Gurner and her son were to transport their household goods to some new abode. So cleverly did this accomplished agent manage matters, that in less than three weeks he reappeared in Voysey-street with two maiden sisters, whose minds were set upon a genteel business, and who entertained Mrs. Gurner’s ideas about the vulgarity of scales and weights. To these two spinsters, sallow of complexion and sour of aspect, Mr. Plyson exhibited Mrs. Gurner’s account-books, and demonstrated by a species of arithmetical conjuration that the business had been an eminently remunerative one during that lady’s lengthened career. He dwelt much upon the ladies’ wardrobe having been established twenty years, whereby he argued its unchequered prosperity; and was altogether so convincing, that the elderly spin-

sters, after coming backwards and forwards several times, and 'mauling about' the stock-in-trade, as Jarred called it, ultimately agreed to give five-and-forty pounds for the stock and good-will, and to become proprietors, as annual tenants, of the house and lodgers, 'all unfurnished and permanencies,' Mrs. Gurner remarked proudly.

Mrs. Gurner was ravished at the prospect of removal to a new abode. Her dreams were haunted by visions of eight-roomed tenements at Brompton or South Kensington—districts which nowadays represent a distinction without a difference. She thought seriously of the Kennington-road, and had her fancies about Camberwell; and in her daily tasks and nightly slumbers she was pursued by the image of a nice little bit of garden, which, with the natural yearning of a soul long prisoned in a labyrinthine wilderness of brick and mortar, she had set her mind upon possessing.

'It would be such an interest for you, Jarred,' she pleaded, 'and so good for your health, to do a little gardening of a morning before breakfast, if it was only to train a scarlet-runner. You'd enjoy your

roll and your rasher, or your Yarmouth bloater, ever so much better for a breath of fresh air.'

'Well, I shouldn't mind a bit of a grass-plat, and a tree to smoke my pipe under,' said Jarred yieldingly.

'Or an arbour, Jarred, with a nice little table in it, and all comfortable. Hops grow so quickly, and climb so gracefully.'

'Yes, and so do slugs and spiders,' grunted Jarred with a cynical air.

'Do you remember that arbour at Cricklewood, where we had tea one Sunday afternoon, ever so many years ago, when you took me for an outing, Jarred? We did so enjoy ourselves, and it was quite romantic and rural-like to hear the cows lowing in the meadows, and see the hansoms driving past to the Welsh Harp.'

'I'll tell you what,' said Jarred, after a few thoughtful whiffs of his pipe, 'I wouldn't mind a nice little detached cottage, where we could be snug and comfortable and all to ourselves, and where Loo could come to see us when she had the mind, without having a pack of street-boys and magging old women

staring at her. But I won't have anything to say to Brompton or South Kensington; that sounds too much like tabbies and psalm-singing.'

'Besides which, I'm afraid the rents would be beyond us in that neighbourhood,' replied Mrs. Gurner, ready to concede any point now that Jarred seemed inclined to satisfy the desire of her soul for a suburban residence and a garden.

'Of course,' said Jarred; 'wherever there's psalm-singing the rents go up. You stick a gothic church with a tall steeple in the middle of an empty field, and three years afterwards you've got a genteel suburb. The semi-detached villas sprout up like mushrooms after rain. I'll tell you what, old lady, if you've set your heart on a bit of garden, I'll walk over Camberwell way this afternoon, and look about me.'

'Lor, Jarred,' cried Mrs. Gurner, enraptured, 'when you speak like that you remind me of your father in his best days!'

'Thank you, mother. I daresay you mean it as a compliment, but I don't care to be reminded of any resemblance between myself and that party.'

‘He was as fine a man as ever wore shoe-leather when he and I were married,’ answered Mrs. Gurner plaintively. ‘You remember him when he was but a wreck, Jarred; when things had gone wrong with him, and he’d been led astray. But you oughtn’t to be hard upon him, Jarred. It isn’t given to every one to keep the right path; and there’s many times I’ve sat in this chair and sobbed my heart out for fear your poor father’s weakness was hereditary, and you was going the same way.’

‘No,’ said Jarred with dignity; ‘I’m not a saint, but I have contrived to stop short of felony.’

‘Ah, Jarred, if you knew how narrow is the line of divergence! Your poor father would never have gone astray if it hadn’t been for the betting-ring. He always used to say it was a mill-stream, and would suck him down some day; and so it did.’

‘I think you may as well let bygones be bygones, mother. There’s no particular good in raking up stale mud.’

‘When the heart is overloaded, Jarred, there must be some relief.’

‘You’d better employ yourself in furbishing up

the stock against those two unhappy females enter into possession. I'll take an Atlas as far as Walworth-gate,' said Jarred, putting on his hat.

'Coldharbour-lane is a lovely neighbourhood,' suggested Mrs. Gurner. 'I remember the famous Greenacre murder when I was a girl, and a portion of the body being found in Coldharbour-lane. There's the Grove, too, where George Barnwell—'

But Jarred had vanished, and Mrs. Gurner, with her chronic sigh, took up a clothes-brush and began the work of renovation upon a well-worn velvet mantle.

Perhaps Jarred, in yielding to his mother's desire for fresh woods and pastures new—in the shape of 'a bit of garden'—was not altogether sacrificing inclination to duty. In sooth, since the idea of mending his ways and breaking with the Jobury set had stolen upon him, Voysey-street had lost much of its old familiar charm. Voysey-street without the Jobury set was dismal as a deserted club-house, and Jarred felt that his only chance of holding himself aloof from the too fascinating parlour of the King's Head was to put a three-mile walk, or a threepenny omnibus ride,

between his own abode and temptation. Even then there was the possibility that the tempter might be too strong for him. He might find himself drawn back to the enchanted spot. Yet by quarrelling with Jobury he had, as he told himself, taken a step in the right direction. He and Mr. Jobury now cut each other with cruellest deliberation at every chance encounter; but were Jobury, overcome by a gush of feeling, to extend his hand, and cry, 'Gurner, what an ass you've made of yourself!' Jarred felt that all the strength of his manhood would not be strong enough to resist that friendly appeal. He would melt at once, and he and Joseph Jobury would again be as brothers. So Jarred made his way into Regent-street, by various short cuts through noisome alleys—having your thoroughbred Londoner's antipathy to broad and airy streets and cleanly rectangular ways—and anon clambered up to the box-seat of an Atlas, which carried him as far as Walworth-turnpike.

Mr. Gurner had passed the few years of his wedded life in this neighbourhood, and a thread of tender memories was interwoven with those narrow side-streets which intersect the district between the



two broad highways of Walworth and Kennington. He had been fond of his young wife, after his own careless fashion, and they had lived comfortably together for four years of a nomadic kind of existence ; roaming from lodging to lodging, with a small cart-load of battered old goods and chattels, which just served to furnish a couple of rooms in a scanty gipsy fashion. They had moved for the mere pleasure of locomotion, it would seem, but urged thereto by some fond hallucination that the new second-floor to which they were going was infinitely superior in accommodation and situation to the domicile they were leaving ; and in this manner had peregrinated all over Walworth—now to be found on a first-floor in Beresford-street ; anon ascending a story higher in Manor-place, or making a flank movement to Hampton-street. Mrs. Jarred Gurner had died of a cold caught in her last change of abode, on which occasion the nomads had pitched their tent too soon after the scrubbing of the floors. Old Mrs. Gurner was wont to describe pathetically how that damp second-floor back had settled upon Louisa's lungs ; but the gods may have beheld

that young matron with peculiar favour, inasmuch as the fatal shaft struck her before age had withered or custom staled her in the estimation of Mr. Gurner. She died at four-and-twenty years of age, and Jarred honestly lamented her. It was after her death that he cast in his lot with his mother, and became joint proprietor with her of the house in Voysey-street, whither Louisa—then between two and three years old—was conveyed. And thus it happened that Loo had grown up in Voysey-street, and had no memory of any other shelter than that dingy old tenement in a decayed locality.

To-day, surveying the bustling Walworth-road from the box-seat of the Atlas, Jarred felt a pang of regret for his bright young wife, dead twenty years ago. He remembered their shifty wandering life, their cosy little hot suppers, and savoury meat-teas; the banquets they had made upon bloaters and bread-and-butter; their aldermanic feasts upon sausages or a grilled haddock; their evening rambles in 'the Road,' when the shop-windows were lighted and the pavements crowded, and the scene had, for them, all the life and brightness of a Parisian boulevard.

‘Poor old days, they’re past and gone!’ Jarred said to himself with a sigh. ‘I should have been a better man, I think, if Louisa had lived.’

An idle fancy this, perhaps ; yet the thought had a softening influence, and Mr. Gurner esteemed himself more kindly on account of that capacity for better things which had been nipped in the bud by his wife’s untimely death. With this softer feeling full upon him, and at every footstep recalling fond memories of his youth, Jarred peregrinated Camberwell, and about sunset discovered a queer little lop-sided house, with a weedy neglected garden backing on to a canal. The garden was small certainly ; but it was larger than the oblong patch of barren ground which is usually allotted to a modern villa within three miles of Charing Cross, and it was screened from the outer world by a dense hedge of elder hawthorn. In the middle of the rank grass-plot there stood a fine old pear-tree—a tree that must have been planted a century ago, when Camberwell was among the most rustic of suburban villages—a tree with a thick rugged trunk and spreading branches, which in this autumnal season bore actual pears. They might

have the flavour of turnips and the consistence of wood, but they were pears.

That pear-tree decided Jarred. There was a decent-sized room on the first-floor, with a window facing north—an apartment which would serve for Mr. Gurner's work-room; and he did not concern himself in any wise about the rest of the rooms, which were somewhat small and eccentric in shape. He made no inquiries as to coal-cellar or wash-house, he drew no evil augury from the smoke-blackened chimneypiece in the kitchen; but he struck a bargain on the spot with the agent who showed him the tenement. He was to have the house—Malvina Cottage was its name—rent-free for the ensuing quarter, on consideration of his foregoing all repair and embellishment thereof, and at an annual rent of five-and-twenty pounds afterwards.

‘And it's one of the cheapest houses in Camberwell,’ said the agent with conviction, ‘and one of the most convenient for a small family.’

‘It seems to have been a longish time to let,’ remarked Jarred, contemplating the weedy garden.

‘I might have let it no end of times, if I hadn't

stuck out for a substantial tenant,' replied the agent. 'By the bye, I suppose you can give satisfactory references.'

'I have lived twenty years in the house I now occupy,' said Jarred loftily; 'and I can refer you to my landlord.'

'That's more than sufficient.'

Jarred returned to Voysey-street after dark, well satisfied with his work. That pear-tree had fascinated him. He had pleasant ideas of long lazy Sabbath mornings, seated in a beehive chair under that tree, smoking the pipe of contentment, and listening to the church-bells as they called less independent-minded citizens to the morning service. He liked the notion of Malvina Cottage, that domicile being in a peculiarly retired corner—a narrow little bit of lane between a church and the canal, which led nowhere. He felt that he could live his own life there, and that his artistic powers in the manipulation of the fiddle family would burgeon afresh in that peaceful retirement.

He gave Mrs. Gurner a glowing description of the cottage, firing that long-suffering matron's soul

with the idea that she was going to begin life afresh as a lady.

‘You can keep a decent servant, old woman,’ he said ; ‘not one of your chance girls, that come from nowhere, and are always gone home to their mothers when one wants them to run on an errand. On the income Leyburne allows us, and what I can add to it, we ought to live comfortably.’

‘And so we can, Jarred, if you will keep away from the public-house.’

‘I mean to do it, mother. I shall take my glass of hollands-and-water at home like a gentleman. I’m sick of your public-house ruffraff.’

This was Jarred Gurner’s renunciation of his vices, and he was very much in earnest. He had tasted too much of the dust and ashes that constitute the core of life’s Dead-Sea fruit, and was inclined to forego pleasures that had brought discomfort and disgust in their train. And deep in his heart there lurked the desire to be more worthy of his handsome daughter, a less incongruous element in Mrs. Walter Leyburne’s life.

‘I know she’s fond of me,’ he said to himself,

'and she has been true as steel from first to last. But if she were to meet me walking in the street with any of my old chums she'd be obliged to cut me. I should like to stand a little bit higher in the social scale, so that Loo could point to me, and say, "That's my father," without a blush.'

## CHAPTER XIII.

‘ Meantime Luke began  
To slacken in his duty ; and, at length,  
He in the dissolute city gave himself  
To evil courses : ignominy and shame  
Fell on him—

\* \* \* \* \*  
There is a comfort in the strength of love ;  
’Twill make a thing endurable, which else  
Would upset the brain, or break the heart.’

It was Mrs. Gurner’s last day but one in Voysey-street. The furniture was ready for removal ; the small stock of glass and crockery packed in a crate, with the ironmongery at bottom by way of ballast ; Jarred’s pictures—the Guido for which he had so long sought a purchaser, and various other canvases of problematical value—swathed in an old dressing-gown, and bound together with a clothes-line ; a battered old portmanteau, standing on end in the passage ; the fire-irons tied up in brown paper ; the chest of drawers turned the wrong way ; a general



air of upside-downishness pervading the apartments, so soon to be abandoned by their present tenants.

The day was waning, and Mrs. Gurner sat alone by her dismantled hearth. She had toiled patiently since morning at the packing, while Jarred was agreeably busy at Malvina Cottage, helping a jobbing carpenter to nail up shelves, and put up a bedstead or two, and directing the operations of a jobbing gardener, who was endeavouring to reduce the neglected garden to order and symmetry by means of a scythe and a pruning-knife.

Having done her duty bravely—struggling heroically with feather-beds, and nearly dislocating her spine in the delicate task of packing the crate—Mrs. Gurner seated herself in one of the two remaining chairs, and indulged in the luxury of a ‘good cry.’ Why she should weep at the prospect of abandoning a place which she had long yearned to leave is a question for psychologists to answer. She wept with a vague self-pity; remembering the dreary years she had lived in that house, and the small leaven of joy in her full measure of grief and care. She had struggled on, grubbed on, somehow, for twenty years,

never utterly free from anxiety, rarely knowing an hour which had not been haunted by the vision of an angry tax-gatherer or an exasperated landlord. And yet, just at the last, she shed regretful tears, remembering stray hours of comfort, thinking of this old parlour as the living think of their beloved dead, forgetting its faults, remembering only its better qualities.

‘I don’t think there’s a snugger room of a winter’s evening, or a better grate to draw,’ she said to herself. ‘I only hope the chimneys don’t smoke at Malvina Cottage, and that there’s an oven that will bake a pie. Jarred might have paid me the compliment to ask me to go over to Camberwell and see the house before he settled everything, but he always had such impetuous ways.’

Mrs. Gurner made herself a cup of tea dolefully, as if she had been infusing hemlock for a final sedative, and produced the remains of yesterday’s dinner from the cupboard ; but she was too depressed in spirit to care much for the good things of this life, and the blade-bone of a cold shoulder had no charm for her. She sat and sipped her tea and meditated ; now shaking her head pensively with a languid sigh, now

wiping a tear from her dim old eyes. By the time she had finished her third cup she had arrived at a desperate resolution.

‘I’ll go round to Wimpole-street, and have another look at her before I leave the neighbourhood,’ she said to herself. ‘I’ve never annoyed her, or gone near her, or put forward any claim, in all these years ; but I feel as if I couldn’t go across the water—for at my age I’m not likely to be coming backwards and forwards to this part of London—until I’ve had another look at her, and heard her pretty voice again. I don’t seek for anything from her, wealthy as she is ; I don’t want to obtrude myself upon her ; but I feel as if it would do me good to see her.’

Mrs. Gurner rose, and hastened to remove the traces of her day’s labour by means of mild ablutions, conducted rather upon the continental-hotel principle, of a little water in a small basin going a long way. She brushed and curled her front, put on a clean collar, and a large and awe-inspiring brooch of the cameo tribe, representing a straight-nosed Minerva in a helmet—a goddess whom Mrs. Gurner

insisted upon mistaking for Britannia. Since the sale of the plum-coloured satin, and the disposal of the stock-in-trade, Mrs. Gurner possessed no such thing as a best gown ; but she shook and brushed her every-day raiment, and contrived to make herself tolerably tidy. As she contemplated her front and bonnet sideways in the small and somewhat cloudy looking-glass, she flattered herself that there could be no mistake as to her pretensions to gentility.

It was only six o'clock, and she knew that Jarred, pleased with Malvina Cottage as a child, with a new toy, was not likely to return till long after dark. She had laid in provision for his supper—a couple of pork-chops with the kidney in them—and felt easy in her mind ; so she locked the parlour-door behind her, slipped the key under the mat—an agreed-upon hiding-place—and set out upon her errand.

She went by various small streets to Regent-street, and thence across Cavendish-square to Wigmore-street, and into Wimpole-street, the professional aspect of which thoroughfare impressed her strongly. She walked briskly along, looking at the numbers, till she came to Dr. Ollivant's door. Here she

stopped, and knocked a timorous double-knock and jingled the bell feebly.

‘I feel *that* faint, that I’m sure I shall drop if the door isn’t opened quick,’ she said to herself.

There was some delay before the door opened, but Mrs. Gurner contrived to maintain her equilibrium, and had just strength to inform the butler, in a faint voice, that she wished to see Mrs. Ollivant on particular business.

‘I don’t think my mistress will be able to see you,’ the man answered; ‘my master is very ill, and Mrs. Ollivant is in his room.’

‘O dear!’ sighed Mrs. Gurner, ‘I’d set my heart upon seeing her this evening.’

‘If it’s an application for relief, or anything in that way, it’s not the least use,’ said the butler, almost shutting the door in the timorous visitor’s face.

At this insult Mrs. Gurner plucked up her spirit.

‘I’m not a pauper, though I do not come in my carriage-and-pair,’ she replied. ‘Perhaps if you’ll be good enough to say that a connection of your mistress’s wishes to have a few words with her, Mrs. Ollivant will be good enough to see me.’

The man looked doubtful. After all, this shabby-genteel female might be a poor relation of his master's wife's. Needy connections are crab-apples that grow upon every family tree. Perhaps it might be an unwise thing to be churlish to this elderly applicant.

'If you'd like to step in and wait for a few minutes, I'll send up your name,' said the butler.

Whereupon Mrs. Gurner entered the hall, and was ushered into the dining-room—a dismal apartment in the ghastly London twilight, and containing no portable property within reach of the intruder, should she be an impostor with larcenous intentions. The sideboard was locked; even the dryasdust books and pamphlets, usually exposed upon the table for the entertainment of patients, had been bundled into a heap and put away by the careful seneschal.

'Your name, if you please, ma'am.'

'Gurner,' replied the visitor hesitatingly, as if rather ashamed of that cognomen.

The butler retired, and sent a housemaid up to the sick-room, with the intimation that a person by the name of Gurner, and asserting herself to be a connection of Mrs. Ollivant junior, was waiting in the

dining-room ; he himself keeping watch and ward over the door of that apartment, lest Mrs. Gurner should levant with the fire-irons or the black marble timepiece, or should make a raid upon the property in the hall.

Flora came out of the sick-room at the housemaid's summons, fluttered and wondering. The girl had forgotten Mrs. Gurner's name, and had only contrived to say that a relation of her mistress's was waiting below ; a startling announcement to Flora, who hardly knew of the existence of any one claiming kindred with her.

The doctor was asleep—that fitful slumber of exhaustion which seems to give so little rest. He was well guarded, for his mother had come from the Willows, and kept watch by his pillow night and day, whereby the professional nurses found their labours wondrously lightened.

‘What shall I do, mamma?’ said Flora helplessly, when the housemaid had stumbled through her message.

‘You had better see this person, I suppose, my love. There can be no harm in seeing her.’

So Flora went reluctantly to her unknown visitor, the butler opening the dining-room door with his grandest air as he ushered her in.

‘Shall I bring the lamp, ma’am?’

‘If you please,’ said Flora, almost afraid at finding herself in the semi-darkness with a stranger.

‘I trust you will forgive my intruding upon you at such a time, Mrs. Ollivant,’ began the visitor.

Flora gave a start of surprise.

‘I think I have heard your voice before,’ she exclaimed.

‘Yes, my dear young lady, we have met once before.’

‘O, you wicked old woman!’ cried Flora, kindling with sudden indignation. ‘I know you quite well. How dare you come here and pretend that you are a relation of mine? You above all other people! You who might have saved me years of agony if you had only spoken the truth when you came to see me at Kensington! You who knew that I was breaking my heart for an imaginary grief; that Dr. Ollivant, the best and noblest of



men, was weighed down by the burden of an imaginary crime !'

'Circumstances alter cases, my dear young lady,' pleaded Mrs. Gurner. 'There were reasons why I could not speak so freely that day as I should like to have spoken. My granddaughter's happiness and prosperity in life depended upon my keeping the secret—a girl that was brought up by me from a sickly child of three years old, and was like a daughter to me. I said all that I dared venture upon saying. I hinted to you that it was foolish to grieve for a sweetheart that had been from the very first more taken by Louisa than by you. More than that was not in my power to say. When my son Jarred trusted me with the secret about Mr. Leyburne, he made me take my Bible oath not to breathe a word of it to a mortal. I shouldn't be here to-night if I hadn't heard from Louisa that you and Mr. Leyburne had met at Killarney, and that the secret was a secret no longer.'

'And that was your granddaughter—Mr. Leyburne's wife—whom I saw with him, I suppose,' said Flora with involuntary scorn.

‘That was our Loo ; as good a girl as ever lived, and the best of granddaughters. Never did a cross word pass between us in all the years she and me spent together,’ protested Mrs. Gurner, happily oblivious of all bygone misunderstandings.

‘She is very handsome,’ said Flora, with that latent touch of scorn in her tone.

‘She always had the makings of a handsome woman, but she’s improved wonderfully since her marriage. Prosperity makes a great difference in people. I was counted a good-looking young woman in my day,’ sighed Mrs. Gurner, ‘but quite a different style from our Loo. She takes after the Gurners. The Shrubsons were fair and blue-eyed. My daughter that went to Australia was a thorough Shrubson ; her eyes were as blue as yours ; yes, my dear young lady, just such eyes as yours, with the self-same look in them.’

Flora was not interested in these personal details. She was thinking with deepest anger and regret how much pain this wretched old woman could have spared her.

‘Did you know that my husband considered

himself guilty of Walter Leyburne's death,' she asked; 'and that your son traded upon his knowledge of my husband's secret, and extorted money from Dr. Ollivant?'

'No, Mrs. Ollivant; if my son Jarred demeaned himself to do that, he did it without my knowledge. I was never trusted by Jarred an inch further than it suited his convenience to trust me. Many a time have I suspected that he had means of getting money beyond my knowledge; but never did I think of anything so bad as that. All he told me about Mr. Leyburne was that he was supposed to be dead, but was really alive, and that he was going to marry our Loo. He had been engaged to you, and it was only his supposed death that set him free. Of course my feelings and my interests were with Loo, the granddaughter I had brought up from an infant. She hadn't got through so much as the measles when she came to me, and I think if she whooped for one month the second year I had her, she whooped for ten. I never knew a child have the whooping-cough so long or so strong.'

'Why did you come here to-night?' asked Flora.

‘Was it to gloat over my misery? My husband is dying.’

‘Gloat over your misery! O my blessed lamb, how can you say such cruel words?’ exclaimed Mrs. Gurner. ‘You cut me to the quick. If you were to take a knife and plunge it into me, you couldn’t hurt me worse. I came because I am going to leave this neighbourhood, and at my age a three-mile distance is an insurmountable obstacle; and I felt a yearning to see you before I left Voysey-street.’

‘I can’t understand why you should wish to see me,’ said Flora. The butler brought in the lamp at this moment, and placed it on the table, illuminating Mrs. Gurner’s time-worn visage, which was turned towards Flora with a piteous deprecating look. ‘Nor can I understand why you should come to me with a falsehood, and announce yourself as a relation.’

‘Suppose I were to tell you that there was no falsehood at all in that statement, Mrs. Ollivant. Suppose I were to tell you that four years ago, when I first heard of you living with your papa in Fitzroy-square, I knew you were my own blood-relation—my own granddaughter—as near to me as our Loo is—

my dead daughter's only child—and yet kept myself aloof from you, and wouldn't come anigh you, or seek to benefit by your father's wealth to the extent of a sixpence, for fear I should bring trouble and shame upon you. Perhaps you would think a little better of me, and feel a little more kindly towards me, if you knew that.'

'Is this true?' gasped Flora.

'Gospel truth, every word of it. When I came to see you at Kensington, and spoke to you of my daughter that went to Australia and married, and died young, leaving an only child, a girl—just such a one as you, perhaps—it was of your own blessed mother I spoke, though I couldn't put it clearer. It was my daughter, Mary Gurner, that your father married, though she changed her name when she went across the sea, on account of family troubles at home; bitter disgrace that came upon her poor foolish father, through embezzling his employer's money to lay it on one of those sinful racehorses, which are always leading men to destruction; and if there was an act of parliament passed to have them all exterminated it would be a blessing for wives and

families. My husband, James Gurner, was as fine a man as you could see in a day's walk, but race-horses and horsey companions were the ruin of him; and one miserable morning I saw him led away from his own breakfast-table, with handcuffs under his coat-sleeves. There was no Portland or Dartmoor in those days, so my James was sent over the water to Van Diemen's Land, where they took him to a dreadful place called Tasman's Peninsula, a bit of land hanging on to the world by a thread as you may say, and with the sea all raging and roaring round it, and sharks playing about in the scurf, and a chain of savage dogs to guard the poor misguided creatures that was sent there. And there they dressed my poor James in gray and yellow, and called him a canary bird; which the disgrace of it and the poor diet broke his heart, and he went off with congestion of the lungs in the second year of his time. Mary was passionately fond of her father; so she went out to Van Diemen's Land after him, and took any situation she could get there, so as to be near him, and to see him now and then, when the rules and regulations permitted.'

‘And she was my mother!’ murmured Flora wonderingly.

It seemed a hard thing to have this ignominy cast upon her all at once; to know that her maternal grandfather had been a convict, that her maternal grandmother was a person whose relationship she must needs blush to own. The only comforting part of the story was that which concerned her mother. It was some consolation to know that she had been tender and devoted, unselfish and faithful.

‘My poor mother!’ she repeated; ‘she went out alone to that strange country to be near her wretched father?’

‘Yes, she was with him when he died; and then she left Van Diemen’s Land and went as nursery governess in a family that travelled from one place to another, unsettled like, till they took up their residence at Hobart Town; and a year or two afterwards your father saw her, and fell in love with her, and married her off-hand. She wrote to tell me how happy she was, and she sent me money very often; but she implored me never to let her husband know

that she was the daughter of a felon. "It wouldn't turn him against me," she said, "he's too true for that; but it would grieve him to the heart; it might break his heart to know that his child was descended from a convict." So I made a solemn promise that I would never hold any communication except with her, and never intrude myself on her married life when she came home to England; little thinking that she was to be taken away so soon, and that I was to lose all the help and comfort that she had been to me. But I kept my promise, and never came near you or your father, or put forward a claim to your notice, though I knew you were living two or three streets off, rolling in riches.'

'It was very good of you,' said Flora gently. 'I would gladly have given you any assistance in my power; indeed it would have been only a duty, had I known your claim upon me. Anything I can do for you now—'

'No, no,' cried Mrs. Gurner eagerly; 'don't think that; pray don't think that! I didn't come here for what I could get. I hadn't a mercenary thought. The little that I want for the few years I



have to live my son Jarred is pretty safe to provide, thanks to Mr. Leyburne, who allows him a handsome income; and I believe he means to turn over a new leaf, and not squander it on horse-racing, as he has done, which things have been looking brighter for us this last few weeks than they have for a long time. No, my pretty love, I didn't come here to ask for anything; I only came for one look at your sweet face, so like poor Mary's. I should never have let out about the relationship, perhaps, if it hadn't been for your man-servant, with his high and mighty airs; throwing out that I was a beggar, and as good as shutting the door in my face. That was too much for my feelings, as a lady, and I blurted out the truth, just to let him know that he was talking to his betters.'

'I am very glad you have told me the truth,' said Flora gravely. 'I was foolishly proud when I thought myself superior to your granddaughter. It is only right that I should be humiliated. Do not suppose that I am ashamed of my dear mother,' she added hastily; 'I honour her memory for her devotion and her love. But—but—you can understand

that it wounds me a little to know that my grandfather was a felon.'

'I didn't ought to have told you,' exclaimed Mrs. Gurner, conscience-stricken, 'but I couldn't resist it, when you spoke so unkindly just now, knowing how I'd sacrificed my own feelings and my own interest to keep my promise to your mother.'

'Forgive me,' said Flora humbly; 'I am too unhappy to be kind.'

And then it occurred to her that she was called upon to make some demonstration of affection—perhaps to kiss this newly-discovered grandmother—and she felt that she could not. Money she could give, or kindness; but affection was not forthcoming at so short a notice.

'Let me help you in some way,' she said. 'I shall be very glad if I can be of any use to you. I have plenty of money always at my disposal. You need never want for anything that I can give.'

'God bless you, my lamb!' sobbed Mrs. Gurner; 'you're your mother all over. I won't pretend that a five-pound note, once in a way, wouldn't be a god-send: for even if Jarred does keep things straight for

the future, it would be a comfort to me to know that I had a pound or two of my own laid by. And if you will let me come and see you now and then—say once in six weeks, for instance—and sit and talk of your poor mother for half an hour or so, it would do me a world of good.'

'Come as often as you like, by and by,' said Flora, 'if my husband recovers. But I fear he is dying.'

'My blessed love, while there's life there's hope.'

'That is what the doctors tell me. He has lingered longer than they expected, but there is no sign of recovery yet, and the hope seems so faint.'

## CHAPTER XIV.

*'Elle aimait, elle aimait comme aiment les courtisanes et les anges, avec orgueil, avec humilité.'*

WHILE Flora watched and waited beside the bed where her husband lay, life trembling in the balance, life at odds with death which should prevail, doctors doubtful, and discoursing only in vaguest oracles, nurses fain to admit that they had rarely seen a patient brought lower, even when the last awful damps of swift-coming mortality stole over the ashen face, indicative of inevitable doom—while Flora spent her days and nights in passionate bursts of tearful prayer, or intervals of silent hopelessness, that other fair young wife, Louisa Leyburne, knew only the gladness and beauty of life ; wandering from one fair scene to another, from lake to mountain, from wild seashore to verdant inland valley, unspeakably happy with that one companion who was to her mind an epitome of all that is noblest and brightest in mankind. Perhaps there is no condition of the human

mind which comes nearer perfect happiness than that of the fetish-worshipper—the man or woman whose life is governed by a master-passion, whose thoughts and desires all tend to one fixed centre, whose aspirations follow one ever-shining star—and of all such idolaters the wife who adores her husband is the happiest. Life for her is as ecstatic as that one mystic night-watch in the sanctuary when the deluded Indian girl believes she holds communion with her god. She is no less blind in her devotion, no less exalted in her surrender of self, merged in an imagined divinity. In three years of wedded life it had never occurred to Louisa that this genius who had made her his handmaiden was after all of the same clay as his fellow-men; moulded like them out of various weaknesses; like them prone to err. To her he seemed simply perfect. To suppose that Raffaele had been a better painter, or Rubens a more useful member of society, than Walter Leyburne would have been rank blasphemy in the opinion of his wife. The world would think so, of course, for some time to come, both Raffaele and Rubens having been more fortunate in their sur-

roundings and opportunities ; but for her, who knew him, to set earth's grandest genius above him would have been impossible.

'I know what you *can* do, Walter, when once you make up your mind to work honestly,' she would say to him sometimes, with a superb air of conviction, 'and I long for the day when you will really begin your career.'

'My love, let us make the most of our honeymoon,' the young husband had answered gaily.

But the honeymoon had now lasted three years—three years of the brightest, easiest, most unconventional life possible to two happy lovers—and Louisa declared that it was time for her husband to set to work. He had not been altogether wasting his days during that sunny idlesse in fair foreign lands. His studies and sketches would have loaded a Pickford van. He had exhibited a genre picture here and there : in Brussels, where Madou himself had complimented the young Englishman ; in Milan ; in Paris, where the critics had been for the most part favourable to the nameless stranger. The pictures were the simplest of compositions, but showed power.

Loo reading a letter in a sunlit garden ; Loo playing with her baby in the firelight ; Loo looking dreamily across the moonlit waves ; always Loo ; that most patient and devoted of models was never weary.

Utterly serene had been those three years of wedded life to the idol himself. It is astonishing how slow the human fetish is to tire of incense or worship. Walter accepted his wife's adoration with a charming equanimity ; sunned himself in her admiring smiles ; felt that he must really possess some latent element of greatness, or so sensible a woman could not think so much of him. Not for one instant, not with one passing thought, transient as summer lightning, had he ever regretted his unequal marriage. Loo suited him to perfection, amused him, interested him, astonished him by the development of an ever-widening mind. He felt as Pygmalion the sculptor might have felt if his animated statue had been a clever woman instead of a nonentity. He would sit in a half-dreamy idleness and wonder at Loo's cleverness, and say to himself, ' This is my work. If she had never loved me, this peerless gem might still have been fetching beer and sweeping

floors in Voysey-street.' He had no foolish shame in the remembrance that she had once been doomed to base drudgery. He was proud of her emancipation, proud of that instinct of his which had discerned the jewel on the dungheap.

One day, when Loo had been reproaching him tenderly for his desultory work, his indifference to renown, he put his arm round her and drew her to the cheval-glass.

'Look there, Loo,' he said; 'that is the one picture I am proud of. Work as hard as I may, I shall never beat that.'

No, it was not possible to be happier than these two were, for they had the exquisite delight of looking back to days when the future, now so fair, was clouded and gloomy; and one of them, at least, felt like a captive who had escaped from prison; nay, almost like a soul released from its clay, and translated to a more ethereal world than this common earth.

'Sometimes I almost fancy my life with you must be one long delicious dream,' Loo said to her husband. 'It is bright enough and wonderful enough for that.'



And now, having scampered through Scotland, and explored Ireland, from the Giant's Causeway to the cliffs of Moher, Mr. and Mrs. Leyburne went back to London, and there was serious talk between them of beginning a steady-going, hard-working life in one of those pretty houses in that South-Kensington district where painters love to congregate.

For Loo had talked her husband into the belief that the time had now come for him to begin his career. The praises won by that last little picture of his were enough to fire ambition in a duller breast than Walter Leyburne's. He had needed just so much recognition of his genius as a stimulus to exertion. His love of art had always kept his pencil busy, and he had been improving himself unconsciously during the last three years; but this taste of absolute success inspired him with new earnestness. He was more at ease too, after that meeting with Flora; for the knowledge that he had acted meanly to Mark Chamney's daughter had been the one drop of bitter in his honeyed cup. A natural aversion from all mental effort, a sybaritish shrinking from an unpleasant duty, had kept him from any

attempt at explanation, after he had returned, as one resuscitated from death, to the realities and obligations of life. Flora was married and happy, he had said to himself. What could it matter to her whether he were living or dead? And as for Dr. Ollivant—who might possibly have some scruples of conscience on account of that struggle on the Devonian cliff—it behoved him to suffer a little for that outbreak of evil passion, more especially as he had won the object of his heart's desire in Flora Chamney. And thus time had slipped by, and Walter Leyburne had made no sign; and it was only when he was brought face to face with the consequences of his conduct in that interview with Flora, when he saw her lifeless at his feet, and heard how she had suffered for his sake, that he realised the extent of that sin of omission of which he had been guilty. He would have given much to atone for his wrong-doing, but there had been a tone in Flora's farewell that forbade all hope of friendship in the future; and then he and Dr. Ollivant had never got on very well together; there had been always a mute antagonism, a lurking jealousy.

“*Lass das Vergangne vergangen seyn!*” “Let what is broken so remain!”’ said Mr. Leyburne with a sigh.

The painter and his wife came to London a few days after the migration from Voysey-street; and while Walter dined with some art-friends at an artists'-club, Loo drove over to Camberwell, and spent the evening with Jarred and Mrs. Gurner in their new abode, which had just now all the charm of novelty, so that its very defects were extolled as beauties. Even Louisa was pleased with the queer little cottage on the bank of the canal. It was pleasantly secluded, and altogether an agreeable change from the publicity of Voysey-street, where on summer evenings the inhabitants seemed to live chiefly on their doorsteps; women standing in little groups, gossiping, with portentous countenances, as if their talk were of the fate of nations; children squatting on the shallow steps, or swarming on the scrapers. There was the privacy of a home in this sheltered little garden, and this old-fashioned cottage with its windows opening on the grass-plat, its humble aspirations towards the beautiful, in the way

of an ornamental gable or two and a fanciful chimney-pot.

It was a strange thing for Loo to sit in the little parlour, drinking tea in state, and suffering herself to be admired by her delighted relatives, as if she had been a princess of the blood-royal receiving the homage of her subjects. Mrs. Gurner contemplated her granddaughter with a rapture that was almost religious in its fervour; handled the material of Louisa's dress, speculated upon its cost per yard, expatiated on the beauty of the Maltese lace, which Loo wore with a royal carelessness.

'And I suppose your maid comes in for all your cast-off dresses,' remarked Mrs. Gurner with a sigh, 'and will dispose of that lace to some one in the wardrobe business for a mere song?'

'I am not quite so extravagant as to throw real lace aside, grandma,' replied Loo; 'but my maid certainly has the reversion of my dresses. You see, I could not think of offering a dress I had worn to you; but if you really admire this gray silk—'

'Admire it, Louisa!' ejaculated the elderly lady; 'I never saw a lovelier dress, or one that more be-

speaks the lady ; and when you have worn it as long as you can wear it, made a hack of it even, it would turn and do up lovely for me, and plenty to spare for turnings, you being so much taller.'

' Then you shall have it, grandma, and I promise not to hack it. But I should like to wear it a little longer, as it is a favourite dress of Walter's,' added Loo, with a blush, as if she had been speaking of a lover rather than a husband.

' Do you remember that heavenly maroon silk he gave you when you were sitting to him for Laminia ?' asked Mrs. Gurner.

' Remember it ? yes, indeed, grandma,' answered Loo, with a sudden troubled look and a faint sigh.

She remembered that Sunday morning at the Kensington boarding-school when Miss Tompion had been outraged by the appearance of the ruby silk, and had said hard things about it. She remembered kneeling on the bare boards of the wardrobe-room at Thurlow House, raining bitter tears upon that 'wine-dark' dress—angry, humiliated, almost despairing.

To how fair a morning had she travelled through that dark night of her life !

She had brought a well-filled purse to Malvina Cottage ; and presently, when she had gratified Mrs. Gurner by inspecting every nook and corner, from the servant's bedchamber—a mere box of a room, squeezed into the would-be Swiss roof—to the wash-house and yard, where Jarred contemplated keeping poultry by and by, when they were settled—Louisa presented her grandmother with a handsome sum of money to buy a little new furniture.

‘ And, grandma dear,’ she added pleadingly, ‘ you would so much oblige me by not buying it second-hand. We had so much of second-hand things in Voysey-street, that I have grown up with a dislike to them. I should like to see that pretty little parlour down-stairs, and your bedroom, and father's, furnished with bright-looking new things, fresh and clean, if they were only varnished deal, and chosen expressly for you ; not other people's discarded furniture.’

‘ My dear, there is nothing to beat a broker's-shop if you want bargains, and know how to buy,’ answered Mrs. Gurner sententiously. ‘ But after such generosity as you have shown me, it would be a

hard thing if I didn't defer to your opinion. The goods shall be bought new and *in sweet*.'

After this, and when the stars were shining over the house-tops of Camberwell, Loo and her father walked alone in the little garden, and talked together with unrestrained affection.

Jarred told his daughter that for her sake, because she was so bright a creature, and had achieved so fair a destiny, he meant to try his hardest to be a somewhat better man in the future. She kissed him tenderly, too deeply moved for many words, and only answered :

'And for the right's sake, dear father ; for the satisfaction of your own conscience.'

'Ah, my dear, I contrived to rub on so many years without being troubled by my conscience. If ever I did feel an uncomfortable sense that my life was all askew, the feeling wore off after a glass of gin-and-water. But now that I am getting older, and see you a lady, and the wife of a rich man—well, I do feel that I should like to place myself on the square, and that there are many little things I used to do in Voysey-street, which were not up to the

mark, not quite in accordance with your rigid moralist's notion of a gentleman's conduct. And I mean to reform that altogether in future, Loo, and to live quietly in my retired little box, and restore pictures and manipulate violins, and earn my living like a man. Of course, for the old lady's sake, my life and health being uncertain, I shall not refuse the three hundred per annum which your husband is liberal enough to allow us.'

'Of course not, father,' replied Loo warmly. Utopian generosity in Mr. Gurner would have alarmed her, as too unnatural a burst of virtue. 'Of course not. And I shall be able to help you, too, out of my pocket-money; for Walter gives me more than I could spend if I were ever so extravagant.'

Louisa's carriage—only a hired brougham yet a while—was at the door, and she was just ready to say 'Good-bye,' when Mrs. Gurner indulged in a little gush of that melancholy which was her normal condition, and from which she only emerged upon rare and exceptional occasions of rejoicing.

'Ah, Loo, you are a happy woman, and have reason to be thankful! The poor young thing that your



husband used to talk about when he was painting his Laminia has had a hard time of it lately.'

Loo looked puzzled.

'Do you mean Miss Chamney, grandma—Mrs. Ollivant, at least?'

'I do, my dear. Dr. Ollivant is lying dangerously ill—at death's door.'

'Where did you hear that, mother?' asked Jarred sharply.

'In Voysey-street, promiscuously; just before we left.'

'Who should be talking of Dr. Ollivant in Voysey-street?' demanded Jarred wonderingly.

'I can't exactly call to mind who it was told me,' replied Mrs. Gurner innocently, 'but I think it must have been some one who had heard one of the medical students from the Middlesex talking of him. There's a many of 'em that take their sandwich and glass of ale at the King's Head between one and two.'

'Ah, very likely,' answered Jarred, with a troubled look. 'So Dr. Ollivant has been ill, has he? Did you hear what was the matter?'

'I think they said it was typhoid fever.'

‘Poor girl!’ said Loo, thinking of the young wife—the woman whom she, Loo, had robbed of her first lover. It was a hard thing that she should be desolate and despairing while her happier rival’s horizon was so bright and clear.

‘But I had my hour of gloom and fear,’ thought Loo, recalling those slow summer days at Liddlecomb, when her lover lay steeped in the night of unconsciousness, and none could tell how swiftly or how soon he might pass into the deeper darkness of death.

## CHAPTER XV.

' Once, as methought, Fortune me kiss'd,  
And bade me ask what I thought best,  
And I should have it as me list,  
Therewith to set my heart in rest.  
I ask'd but for my lady's heart,  
To have for evermore mine own ;  
Then at an end were all my smart ;  
Then should I need no more to moan.'

BITTER were those autumn days in Dr. Ollivant's sick chamber ; bitter and slow to pass ; each several hour prolonged by pain of body and weariness of spirit. The patient had been brought to just that point of prostration in which it would have seemed to the unconcerned humanitarian, looking at the case from a common-sense standpoint, a mercy to let him slip away into the untroubled region of death ; a mercy to loose the tired soul from that corpse-like clay, which had no sense save sense of pain. And perhaps, in these sad days, Flora's worst agony was to see the torture inflicted upon the wearied sufferer

by those ever-changing medicaments which the doctors prescribed; blistering, poulticing, fomenting that feeble body; administering drugs which seemed to have no effect beyond the annoyance they inflicted upon the patient; assailing him, hour after hour, as he lay there moaning out feebly that he wanted only to be left alone.

Never once in that awful period of suspense did Mrs. Ollivant reproach her daughter-in-law by so much as one word. But there were looks the agonised mother could not forbear; looks of infinite pathos, which said plain as plainest words, 'Why did you let this come to pass? Why, if you loved him so well, did you abandon him to such desolation?'

For nearly three weeks Flora watched beside her husband's bed; sitting for hours with his burning hand held in hers; motionless as marble; breathing restrainedly, lest a too audible breath should pierce the filmy veil which divided his troubled sleep from waking. And during all that time the sick man was for the most part unconscious of her presence, indifferent whose hand held his own, whose gentle touch smoothed his pillow or laid lotion-steeped linen on

#### LOST FOR LOVE.

his burning forehead. There had been rare flashes of sense in the midst of delirium—moments in which Cuthbert Ollivant had recognised his wife, and called her by her name; but memory was for the time extinguished. He accepted her presence as a natural thing—knew not that they had ever been parted.

Thus the burden of life went on growing daily heavier, as it seemed to Flora, for three weeks, and then one night—one never-to-be-forgotten night—when she had been praying fervently for hours at a stretch alone in the dressing-room adjoining the sick chamber, where she was supposed to be taking her rest upon the sofa, while Mrs. Ollivant and the night-nurse kept watch—just at that awful hour betwixt night and morning, when the destroying angel is said to be busiest, the change came; and it was a change for the better.

Cuthbert Ollivant awoke from a lethargic slumber, and looked at his mother, with a clearer look in the heavy eyes than she had seen there for a long time. He asked for some drink—wine—anything. The nurse brought him a glass of champagne and soda-water, the only form of nourishment which he had

taken for days past, and even this had been taken most reluctantly. To-night he drained the glass with avidity.

‘That was good,’ he said; and then looking about, he asked, ‘Where is Flora?’

‘I have made her lie down, dear. She has been watching by your bed so long; she has been so patient and devoted.’

Something told the mother that no speech could be so welcome to her son as praise of that idolised wife.

‘Yes; poor child, poor child! I have been ill a long time—so long. That medicine Bayne gave me last is no use. Chlorate—hy—hydrochlorate. I am a little better to-night’—feeling his pulse—‘feeble, very feeble, but not so quick.’

He turned upon his pillow, assisted by the tearful mother, and dropped asleep again. Flora was standing in the doorway between the two rooms watching.

What did this change mean? Both women asked themselves that question. Was it only the prelude of the end, the last flicker, the final rally of expiring

nature? They could only wonder, and wait, and pray.

It was not the end. From that hour Dr. Ollivant's condition improved. Very slow, very tedious, and beyond measure wearisome to the patient was the process of recovery, the slow return of strength, the long interval during which the slightest exertion was a painful labour. But through all Cuthbert Ollivant was happy, for now, for the first time in his life, he was very sure that his wife loved him.

As soon as he was able to be moved, she went with him to Ventnor alone; the patient mother contented to resume her quiet post in the background of her son's life, now that he had his idol again.

They occupied a villa near the sea, and some distance from the town; a solitary villa, from which they looked out upon the green hills and the blue water, and could fancy themselves alone upon some enchanted isle, fair as the romantic land of Prospero and Miranda. Here, as strength gradually returned, and recovered health became a certainty, Dr. Ollivant and his wife were utterly happy. This was better than their honeymoon, Cuthbert would say sometimes,

with the serenest smile that his wife had ever seen upon his face.

She had told him all about that meeting with Walter Leyburne at Muckcross, as soon as he was strong enough to bear any talk upon agitating subjects. She had told him how her heart had yearned for him through all that time of severance; how, her first passion past, there had been no such thing as hatred or scorn in her mind; only bitterest regret that he, whom she had held so noble, should have stooped to deceive.

‘And then Heaven had mercy upon my blindness, and I learned that you were free from the burden of Walter’s death. God had spared you that misery, while chastising you for your weak yielding to temptation, and punishing me for my ingratitude to you.’

‘My love, it was not ingratitude,’ he answered; ‘it was but the natural revulsion of a truthful and noble mind, intolerant of untruthfulness.’

Flora told her husband also of that interview with Mrs. Gurner; confessing with deepest humility the taint upon her maternal ancestry.

‘Are you not ashamed of your wife, Cuthbert,



now that you know she is the granddaughter of a felon ?

‘My dearest love, in the first place, I should be indisposed to believe this Mrs. Gurner without confirmatory evidence ; and in the second, I should love you just as fondly, honour you just as much, if your maternal grandfather had been Thurtell the murderer, or Fauntleroy the fraudulent banker.’

‘So you see, dearest,’ said the doctor, one day, when he had been speaking of his great happiness, ‘Providence has been kind to a sinner who deemed the world well lost for love.’

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THE END.

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